Mazeppa and Mazepa: Tulsa Comedy, Cossack Memory, Ivan Mazepa, Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, and the War Over a Name

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The name Mazepa has never remained safely attached to one man, one country, one church, or one story. It began in history with Ivan Mazepa, the Cossack hetman remembered in Ukraine as a statesman, Orthodox patron, and defender of autonomy, yet condemned in Russian imperial memory as a traitor to Peter the Great. It then passed into European Romantic legend as Mazeppa, the punished lover tied to a wild horse and driven across the steppe, a myth more famous than the facts that inspired it. Centuries later, the name resurfaced absurdly in Tulsa as Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi, a local television comic wizard born from old newspaper cartoons, horror films, and American improvisational weirdness. In 2026, Mazepa returned to the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra as a symbol of Ukrainian historical restoration and Russian outrage. This paper follows Mazeppa and Mazepa across politics, poetry, church memory, local comedy, and wartime propaganda to show how a name becomes a battlefield.

Keywords: Ivan Mazepa, Mazeppa, Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi, Gailard Sartain, Tulsa television, The Uncanny Film Festival and Camp Meeting, Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, Volodymyr Zelensky, Aussie Cossack, Russian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian Orthodoxy, Cossack Hetmanate, Peter the Great, Great Northern War, Battle of Poltava, Orthodox anathema, Ukrainian statehood, memory war, propaganda, Romanticism, Lord Byron, cultural transmission, myth and history, comic absurdism, religious nationalism, Russian imperial memory, Ukrainian national memory.

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Art

1. The Name That Would Not Stay Still

The history of Mazepa begins with a man, but the afterlife of the name quickly escapes biography. Ivan Mazepa was a Cossack hetman, a political actor, a patron of Orthodox culture, and a participant in one of the decisive imperial struggles of early modern Eastern Europe. Yet the name by which he is remembered has never remained confined to archival history. It has passed through imperial denunciation, Ukrainian recovery, European Romanticism, theater, opera, popular illustration, comic strips, local television, and digital wartime propaganda. Each stage has changed the meaning of the name without entirely erasing what came before. Mazepa becomes Mazeppa, Mazeppa becomes spectacle, spectacle becomes joke, joke becomes Tulsa folklore, and the older Mazepa returns as a contested sacred-political symbol in modern Kyiv.

This paper begins from that instability. The name is not simply a label. It is a carrier of memory. In one setting, Mazepa names a Ukrainian statesman who attempted to preserve autonomy against the centralizing power of Peter the Great. In another, he names the archetypal traitor, oath-breaker, and cursed rebel of Russian imperial imagination. In a third, Mazeppa becomes the punished lover of European Romantic art, stripped of most political detail and remembered instead through the sensational image of a naked man tied to a wild horse. In yet another, the name becomes Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi, a Tulsa comic persona whose absurdity depends partly on the sound of old-world grandeur converted into American local weirdness. In contemporary propaganda, Mazepa is reactivated as an accusation: a dead hetman becomes evidence that Ukraine is desecrating sacred space, insulting Orthodoxy, and inviting Russian purification.

The subject, then, is not only Ivan Mazepa. It is how a name moves. It is how history becomes legend, how legend becomes entertainment, how entertainment preserves forgotten fragments, and how old fragments can be weaponized again when political crisis demands symbols. Names that survive for centuries do so because they are adaptable. They can be pronounced with reverence, mockery, fear, laughter, or hatred. Mazepa has survived because he can be made to answer many different needs: national memory, imperial condemnation, erotic spectacle, comic invention, and religious-political mobilization.

The odd pairing of Tulsa's Dr. Mazeppa and Ukraine's Ivan Mazepa is therefore not a gimmick. It is the core of the problem. A local Oklahoma television character and an eighteenth-century Cossack leader seem to belong to different worlds, yet they are joined by a chain of transmission. The comic name did not arise from nothing. It came from an older popular memory of Mazeppa, already simplified and distorted through print culture. That popular memory itself came from Romantic and theatrical treatments of the wild-horse legend. The legend, in turn, was attached to Ivan Mazepa, whose actual political life was far more complex than the image of punishment that later overshadowed him. By the time Gailard Sartain

encountered the name in an old comic-strip context, Mazeppa had already been separated from Mazepa and had become available as a comic relic.

The return of Mazepa to the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra in 2026 closes the circle in a strange way. The name that had wandered through European and American comic culture reappeared at one of the most contested sacred sites in Eastern Christianity. To Ukrainian authorities, the honoring of Mazepa there could be presented as restoration: a patron returned to a place he helped build and endow. To Russian-aligned polemicists, it could be presented as desecration: a cursed traitor installed inside holy ground. The same name that functioned as late-night absurdity in Tulsa became a trigger for outrage in the symbolic war over Kyiv, Orthodoxy, and historical legitimacy.

This is why the spelling difference matters. Mazepa and Mazeppa are not merely variants. They are signs of passage through different memory systems. Mazepa usually points back toward Ukrainian and Russian history. Mazeppa points toward the Western legend, the horse, the poem, the opera, the stage, the cartoon, and the comic afterimage. The two forms overlap, but they do not carry the same cultural weight. The single added consonant marks a shift from politics to myth, from hetman to rider, from archive to spectacle.

At the same time, the two spellings cannot be fully separated. The comic Mazeppa still carries a ghost of the historical Mazepa, even when the audience no longer knows the history. The Telegram denunciation of Mazepa still depends partly on the older scandalous legend, even when it is used for modern wartime purposes. The name survives by shedding context, but it also survives because some context remains latent, ready to be reactivated. A joke can preserve a fossil. A curse can revive a myth. A statue can reopen an imperial wound.

1.1 Mazepa as historical person and symbolic object

Ivan Mazepa was a historical person before he became a symbolic object, but he is now difficult to approach without passing through the symbolic layers placed over him. The historical Mazepa belonged to the world of the Cossack Hetmanate, an autonomous or semi-autonomous political formation caught between larger powers. His career unfolded amid shifting alliances, imperial ambitions, military threats, and ecclesiastical transformations. He governed, negotiated, patronized, maneuvered, and ultimately made a fateful choice against Peter the Great. Any serious treatment must begin there, with the recognition that Mazepa acted in a real political world rather than in the simplified moral theater later constructed around him.

But historical actors who stand at civilizational fault lines rarely remain merely historical. Mazepa's break with Peter made him available for two rival memorial traditions. In Russian imperial memory, he became the traitor par excellence: the man who violated oath, gratitude, hierarchy, and sacred order. This image was strengthened by the language of anathema and

ecclesiastical condemnation. Treason was not merely political; it became spiritual. The rebel against the tsar could be represented as a rebel against holy order itself.

In Ukrainian memory, the same act could be interpreted very differently. Mazepa could become the leader who perceived the danger of Muscovite centralization and tried to preserve or restore Ukrainian political agency. His defeat at Poltava made this reading tragic rather than triumphant. He became not the founder of a successful state, but a sign of interrupted sovereignty. He was the man who lost, but whose loss could be reinterpreted as evidence that the struggle was real, that Ukrainian autonomy had been crushed, and that imperial history had written the verdict after winning the battlefield.

This duality is crucial. Mazepa is not controversial because historians disagree about every fact of his life. He is controversial because the same facts can be placed within incompatible moral frames. To one frame, loyalty to Peter is the central obligation. To the other, loyalty to the autonomy and future of the Hetmanate is the deeper obligation. To one, Mazepa betrayed his sovereign. To the other, he resisted absorption. The dispute is not merely over what happened; it is over which political community has the right to define duty.

Mazepa is therefore a symbolic object because he condenses the larger Russia-Ukraine conflict into a single name. He poses questions that remain alive: Is Ukraine a distinct historical and political subject, or a rebellious part of a greater Russian civilization? Is Moscow the guardian of Orthodox unity, or an imperial power that subordinated older Kyivan inheritance? Is a Ukrainian alliance against Moscow treason, or self-defense? These questions did not begin in 2022, but the war has made them newly urgent. Mazepa's memory is one of the older vocabularies through which the conflict can be narrated.

His role as an Orthodox patron makes the symbolism still more complex. A simple imperial caricature would require Mazepa to be only a traitor, sinner, and destroyer. Yet the record of patronage places him inside the sacred architecture and institutional life of Ukrainian Orthodoxy. He did not merely oppose Peter; he also built, endowed, and protected. This means that honoring him at a religiously charged site is not arbitrary. It draws upon a real association between the man and the sacred landscape. The controversy arises because one tradition remembers the patron, while another insists on remembering only the anathematized rebel.

A symbolic object differs from a historical person because it can be used without being understood. One does not need to know the Cossack Hetmanate in detail to invoke Mazepa as traitor. One does not need to read Romantic literature to understand the humiliating force of the wild-horse image. One does not need to know Tulsa television history to feel that Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi is a comic name. The name works because it has accumulated emotional charge across contexts. It carries authority, strangeness, scandal, and theatricality.

This paper treats Mazepa as both person and object. The person belongs to history. The object belongs to memory. The danger lies in confusing the two. Propaganda often presents a memory-object as though it were the whole historical person. Comedy often detaches the name from history entirely. Scholarship must move between these extremes: recovering the person without pretending the symbolic afterlife is irrelevant.

1.2 Mazeppa as altered spelling, altered memory

The transformation from Mazepa to Mazeppa is more than orthographic accident. It marks the name's entrance into Western European imagination. Once the name traveled into French, English, and other literary environments, it became less tied to the political history of the Hetmanate and more tied to a dramatic legend. The spelling Mazeppa became the name of the rider, the lover, the sufferer, the spectacle. It was no longer primarily the name of a hetman calculating alliances in the shadow of Muscovy, Sweden, Poland, and the Ottoman frontier. It became the name of a body in motion.

The extra "p" is not the cause of this transformation, but it is a visible trace of it. Spelling changes often reveal cultural possession. A name adapted into another language becomes easier to pronounce, print, rhyme, dramatize, and market. Mazeppa is the form that entered poems, operas, plays, paintings, and popular entertainments. It became the form that Western audiences could consume without needing to master the politics of early modern Ukraine. In this sense, Mazeppa is Mazepa after translation into spectacle.

The wild-horse legend was ideal for such translation because it replaced political complexity with a single unforgettable scene. A man is punished for illicit love by being bound naked to a wild horse and sent across the steppe. The image contains humiliation, eroticism, danger, speed, landscape, and survival. It is morally simple enough to be retold and visually powerful enough to be staged or painted. It invites the viewer to ask not what treaties Mazepa negotiated, but whether the bound rider will live.

This is how altered memory works. It does not necessarily erase the original. Instead, it selects one element, magnifies it, and makes it portable. Once the horse legend became dominant, Mazeppa could travel far beyond the contexts in which Mazepa had political meaning. The name no longer required knowledge of Peter the Great, the Great Northern War, the Hetmanate, or Poltava. It required only the thrilling premise of punishment and endurance. The historical man became raw material for an aesthetic symbol.

This shift also made the name morally ambiguous in new ways. The imperial traitor and the adulterous lover are not identical figures, but they reinforce each other. Both are men who break bonds. One breaks political loyalty; the other breaks sexual or marital law. One is punished by defeat and anathema; the other is punished by exposure and forced motion.

Together, these images produce a figure marked by transgression. Later polemic can exploit that fusion. To condemn Mazepa as both traitor and adulterer is to join imperial and sexual shame into one narrative.

Yet Romantic treatments could also invert the meaning of punishment. The bound rider might become heroic precisely because he suffers. The victim of humiliation becomes a figure of vitality, endurance, and destiny. The horse that was meant to destroy him becomes the vehicle of transformation. In this way, Mazeppa could become not merely a sinner punished, but a Romantic rebel carried beyond ordinary society. The very elements used to degrade him could be reinterpreted as signs of exceptional force.

This ambiguity helped the name survive in popular culture. A name that means only one thing has limited range. Mazeppa could be tragic, erotic, heroic, comic, exotic, or absurd. It could support high art and low entertainment. It could appear in poetry, music, stage spectacle, caricature, and eventually a comic-strip joke about tying a boy to a donkey. By the time the name reached Tulsa's Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi, it had already passed through enough transformations that it no longer required explanation. It sounded like a leftover from some grand, ridiculous, half-remembered cultural archive.

The altered spelling therefore points to altered ownership. Mazepa remains closer to the contested histories of Ukraine and Russia. Mazeppa belongs to the wandering afterimage: the legend as consumed, remade, and misremembered by others. But the two forms continue to haunt each other. The Western Mazeppa cannot exist without the Eastern Mazepa. The modern political Mazepa can still be attacked through the scandalous imagery preserved by Mazeppa. The spellings diverge, but the symbolic current still runs between them.

1.3 The method of the paper

This paper uses the name Mazepa/Mazeppa as a guide through several layers of cultural transmission. Its method is not conventional biography, though biography matters. It is not merely literary history, though literature matters. It is not only media studies, though television and Telegram matter. The method is to follow a name across contexts and ask what changes each time the name is used.

The first principle is that names are not passive containers. They are active cultural instruments. A name can summon a story before any evidence is presented. To say Mazepa in a Russian imperial register is to summon treason. To say Mazepa in a Ukrainian national register is to summon autonomy and resistance. To say Mazeppa in a Romantic register is to summon the horse, the body, punishment, and sublime motion. To say Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi in Tulsa is to summon local comic memory, horror-host culture, and absurdist performance. The same sound opens different doors depending on the room in which it is spoken.

The second principle is that distortion is not always a failure of memory. Sometimes distortion is the means by which memory travels. The wild-horse legend may be historically dubious, but its cultural influence is undeniable. The 1902 comic-strip fragment that reportedly gave Sartain the name did not preserve Ivan Mazepa accurately, but it preserved a trace of Mazeppa strongly enough for the name to be available in twentieth-century Oklahoma. Comic distortion can function as an archive of fragments. It keeps alive what formal history forgets, though often in grotesque or laughable form.

The third principle is that propaganda does not invent from nothing. It selects available memory fragments and arranges them for present purposes. The Telegram denunciation of Mazepa at the Lavra works because older materials are already available: the anathema, the traitor charge, the adulterer legend, the Russian Orthodox claim to sacred continuity, and the portrayal of Ukrainian state action as desecration. The post does not need to create these associations. It needs only to activate them in the context of war.

The fourth principle is that comedy and sacred politics should not be separated too quickly. Tulsa's Dr. Mazeppa may seem irrelevant to Kyiv's Lavra, but the comic mutation reveals how deeply the name had already entered popular circulation. Comedy often feeds on solemn ruins. It takes names once connected to aristocracy, war, sex, and punishment, and converts them into sound, persona, costume, and timing. This does not make comedy shallow. It shows how culture digests history. The absurd can be a late stage in the life of a serious symbol.

The fifth principle is that contested sacred sites intensify memory disputes. The Lavra is not simply a backdrop. It is a place where architecture, monastic continuity, imperial claims, Ukrainian sovereignty, and Orthodox legitimacy meet. To install, restore, remove, or reinterpret a figure inside that space is to make a theological-political statement. Mazepa's presence there cannot be reduced to art placement. It becomes a declaration about which past the sacred space is allowed to remember.

The paper therefore proceeds by movement rather than by static classification. It begins with Mazepa as historical and symbolic figure, then follows Mazeppa into legend, spectacle, and Western cultural memory. It then examines the Tulsa mutation, where the name becomes comic and local. Finally, it returns to Kyiv and the Lavra, where Mazepa becomes a wartime symbol and object of polemical fury. This circular structure is intentional. The name leaves history, wanders through myth and comedy, and returns to history changed.

This method also requires a disciplined distinction between fact, legend, and use. Fact asks what can be historically supported. Legend asks what story people repeated and why it became powerful. Use asks what later actors do with the story. The wild-horse tale may not be reliable biography, but it is reliable evidence of how Mazeppa was imagined. The Telegram post may not

be reliable history, but it is reliable evidence of how Mazepa is weaponized in wartime rhetoric. Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi may not teach us much about the Hetmanate, but he teaches us how historical residue can survive as comedy after losing its original explanation.

The paper's argument is that Mazepa/Mazeppa should be understood as a name with multiple afterlives rather than a figure with one correct public meaning. This does not mean that all interpretations are equally true. It means that the struggle over truth is part of the name's history. Russian imperial condemnation, Ukrainian national recovery, Romantic mythmaking, Tulsa absurdism, and Telegram propaganda are not interchangeable. But they are connected by transmission. Each inherits something, alters something, and passes something on.

The result is a theory of cultural memory in miniature. A name begins in political life. It is condemned by empire. It is transformed by legend. It is aestheticized by Romanticism. It is vulgarized by theater and cartoons. It is localized by television comedy. It is re-sacralized by national restoration. It is attacked again by wartime propaganda. At every stage, the name changes function while retaining enough continuity to remain recognizable.

This is why Mazepa and Mazeppa are worth studying together. The historical hetman and the Tulsa comic character are not equivalent, but they are linked by the strange durability of cultural signs. A name can be dragged behind a horse, printed in a comic strip, worn as a television persona, cast in bronze at a monastery, and cursed in a Telegram post. The journey of that name reveals how memory works: not as a clean archive, but as a contested field of echoes, jokes, myths, monuments, and accusations.

2. Ivan Mazepa Between Ukraine, Muscovy, and Empire

Ivan Mazepa stands at the point where biography becomes civilizational argument. His life cannot be understood by treating Ukraine, Muscovy, Poland-Lithuania, Sweden, the Ottoman world, and the Orthodox Church as separate compartments. The world in which he acted was a borderland of overlapping sovereignties, confessional loyalties, military pressures, aristocratic networks, and imperial ambitions. The Cossack Hetmanate was not a modern nation-state, but neither was it merely a passive province awaiting absorption into empire. It had its own elite, military structure, diplomatic memory, legal traditions, church patronage, and political imagination. Mazepa's career unfolded within this unstable order.

The later fight over his name arises because he made choices at a moment when that order was being transformed. Peter the Great was not merely another tsar in a long sequence of rulers. He represented a new centralizing imperial project. His reforms aimed to reorder military power, administration, church authority, elite service, and imperial identity. For the Hetmanate, this raised a fundamental question: could older forms of Cossack autonomy survive inside the

expanding state being built from Moscow and St. Petersburg? Mazepa's final break with Peter was therefore not simply a personal betrayal or a sudden opportunistic gamble. It emerged from the tightening pressure of imperial consolidation.

To Russian imperial memory, Mazepa became the archetype of ingratitude. He had served under the tsar, received honors, held power, and then turned against his sovereign in a moment of war. That memory system treats loyalty to the ruler as the central moral fact. From this perspective, Mazepa's alliance with Sweden during the Great Northern War could only be treason. The language surrounding him hardened into moral and spiritual condemnation: oath-breaker, Judas, heretic, cursed man. The political conflict was absorbed into a sacred vocabulary of betrayal.

To Ukrainian memory, the same act can be read as an attempt to rescue autonomy from imperial absorption. This does not require turning Mazepa into a flawless saint or denying his aristocratic self-interest. It requires seeing that his decision occurred in a world where the Hetmanate's freedoms were narrowing. When Ukrainian historians and political memory recover Mazepa, they often recover him as a statesman who recognized that continued subordination to Peter's project would reduce the Hetmanate to an administrative appendage. In this frame, his defeat is not proof of moral guilt, but the tragic failure of a bid for sovereignty.

The tension between these readings explains why Mazepa remains explosive. The historical facts are not neutral because they touch living political questions. Was loyalty owed upward to the tsar, or outward to the political community of the Hetmanate? Was the Hetmanate a partner, dependency, military estate, frontier polity, or embryo of Ukrainian statehood? Was Moscow the protector of Orthodoxy, or the imperial power that gradually subordinated older Kyivan and Cossack institutions? These questions make Mazepa's biography inseparable from the larger history of Ukraine's contested place between self-rule and empire.

Mazepa's religious patronage intensifies the dispute. A purely Russian imperial caricature requires him to be remembered as a spiritually disgraced traitor. Yet the physical and institutional record of his patronage shows him as a builder within Orthodox civilization. He funded churches, supported monasteries, patronized learning and printing, and contributed to the monumental sacred landscape of Kyiv. He was not an enemy of Orthodoxy in any simple sense. He was a patron of Orthodox culture who later became condemned by an ecclesiastical order aligned with the victorious imperial state. That contradiction lies at the heart of his contested memory.

The problem is not solved by saying that one side remembers and the other side forgets. Both remember selectively. Russian imperial memory remembers the break with Peter and the anathema. Ukrainian national memory remembers patronage, autonomy, and resistance.

European Romantic memory remembers the horse. Tulsa comic memory remembers the name as absurd sound. Contemporary digital propaganda recombines these fragments, often choosing the most humiliating or inflammatory version available. The task of historical interpretation is to restore the layers without pretending they all have equal evidentiary value.

2.1 The Cossack Hetmanate and Mazepa's political world

Mazepa's political world was the Cossack Hetmanate, a formation that defies simple classification. It was not a fully sovereign modern state, but it was not merely an ordinary province. It was a military-political order created in the aftermath of Cossack rebellion, war, treaty, and partition. Its institutions rested on the authority of the hetman, the officer elite, military regiments, local administration, customary rights, Orthodox identity, and negotiated privileges. Its political life was shaped by the memory of agreements, guarantees, and betrayals. This made it deeply sensitive to questions of autonomy.

The Hetmanate occupied a strategic and cultural frontier. To the west lay the Polish-Lithuanian legacy, with its noble republican traditions, Catholic and Uniate pressures, and Ukrainian Orthodox resistance. To the south lay the Crimean Khanate, the Ottoman sphere, steppe warfare, slave raiding, and shifting military alliances. To the east and north lay Muscovy, increasingly powerful and increasingly ambitious. Sweden, too, became relevant in the geopolitics of the Great Northern War. The Hetmanate existed in the middle of this contested space, forced to balance military survival, elite interest, religious identity, and political opportunity.

Mazepa himself was a product of that borderland. He was not a simple peasant rebel or isolated warlord. He belonged to a cultivated elite world. He understood Polish-Lithuanian political culture, Orthodox patronage, aristocratic diplomacy, and Cossack military society. This complexity matters because later propaganda often flattens him into a single vice: treason. But the historical Mazepa was a skilled political survivor operating in a world where every major actor shifted alliances when survival required it. His career was marked by calculation, education, ambition, and the ability to speak the languages of several political cultures.

The office of hetman carried inherent tension. A hetman needed legitimacy among the Cossack elite and population, but also recognition from external powers. He had to protect local rights while satisfying demands from stronger patrons. He had to command military forces while managing internal factions. He had to honor Orthodox identity while navigating imperial church politics. In such a world, loyalty was never simple. Loyalty to an external ruler could conflict with loyalty to local autonomy. Loyalty to the Cossack estate could conflict with broader social interests. Loyalty to Orthodoxy could conflict with loyalty to ecclesiastical authorities aligned with imperial power.

Mazepa's long tenure as hetman gave him time to consolidate authority. He strengthened the officer elite, managed relations with Moscow, supported ecclesiastical and cultural projects, and maintained a careful public loyalty to Peter. This is precisely why his later break shocked and enraged Russian imperial memory. He was not an outsider attacking from beyond the border. He was a trusted insider, a decorated servant, a man who had benefited from the existing order. In imperial moral terms, this made his defection unforgivable.

Yet the same long tenure also gave Mazepa reason to understand the direction of imperial policy. He saw the growing demands of Peter's wars. He saw how military burdens fell upon Cossack lands. He saw the rise of a more centralized and disciplined state. He saw that autonomy granted under earlier arrangements might not survive the new imperial machinery. What Russian memory called ingratitude, Ukrainian memory could call belated recognition. The longer he served Peter, the clearer it may have become that service would not preserve the Hetmanate's freedom indefinitely.

The Hetmanate's internal social structure also complicates any simple national reading. Mazepa was an elite ruler, not a democratic nationalist in the modern sense. His vision of autonomy was shaped by the interests of the Cossack officer class, Orthodox institutions, and the political assumptions of his time. He did not imagine sovereignty in the language of nineteenth- or twentieth-century nationalism. Yet this does not mean later Ukrainian memory is wrong to see him as part of the genealogy of Ukrainian statehood. Historical continuity does not require identical ideology. It requires a line of conflict, memory, and aspiration linking earlier autonomy to later national consciousness.

The borderland nature of the Hetmanate also explains why the accusation of betrayal is inadequate. In imperial centers, loyalty is imagined vertically: the subject owes obedience to the sovereign. In frontier polities, survival often depends on horizontal maneuvering among powers. Alliances shift because domination by any single empire can become fatal. Mazepa's choice for Sweden must be judged within that frontier logic. It may have been risky, miscalculated, or doomed, but it was not unintelligible.

The Great Northern War sharpened every contradiction. Peter needed resources, troops, and loyalty. Sweden offered a possible counterweight. The Hetmanate was caught between imperial demands and the possibility of reconfiguration. Mazepa's decision to align with Charles XII was therefore both strategic and symbolic. Strategically, it attempted to exploit a war between great powers. Symbolically, it declared that the Hetmanate's future did not have to be contained within Peter's imperial project.

The tragedy is that the strategy failed. Poltava did not merely defeat a military alliance. It determined the memory regime that followed. Victory allowed Peter's state to define Mazepa's

act as treason, suppress alternative interpretations, and bind ecclesiastical condemnation to political defeat. Had the outcome differed, Mazepa's name might have entered history as founder, liberator, or architect of a new order. Because he lost, his enemies wrote him first as traitor. Much of modern Ukrainian memory is an attempt to reopen the case closed by imperial victory.

2.2 Patronage, church building, and the Orthodox imagination

Mazepa's role as a patron is essential because it disrupts the simplistic image of the anti-Orthodox traitor. He was one of the great sponsors of Orthodox culture in his world. His patronage included churches, monasteries, educational institutions, printing activity, architectural projects, and the cultivation of a religious-cultural elite. He belonged to a tradition in which political authority and sacred patronage reinforced one another. A ruler proved legitimacy not only through military service or diplomatic success, but through visible support for the church.

This was not incidental decoration. In the early modern Orthodox world, building and endowing churches was a way of inscribing political authority into sacred space. Stone, icon, bell tower, monastery wall, and printed book became instruments of memory. They said that a patron belonged within the history of salvation, community, and civilization. Mazepa's church patronage therefore made claims about who he was and what kind of order he represented. He was not merely a military commander. He was a guardian of Orthodox cultural continuity.

The Kyiv Pechersk Lavra occupies a special place in this context. It was one of the foundational sacred institutions of Eastern Slavic Christianity, associated with monastic sanctity, pilgrimage, learning, relics, and the older prestige of Kyiv. To be a patron of the Lavra was to participate in a sacred history older than Muscovite imperial centralization. This matters because the later Russian imperial story often presented Moscow as the natural guardian and inheritor of Orthodox Rus'. Mazepa's patronage of Kyiv's sacred institutions reminds us that the Kyivan inheritance was not simply absorbed without remainder into Moscow's story.

Mazepa's architectural patronage contributed to what is often called the Cossack Baroque. This style was not only aesthetic. It represented a cultural synthesis linking Orthodox devotion, local elite identity, European artistic currents, and Cossack political aspiration. Churches and monasteries built or renovated under such patronage gave physical form to a Ukrainian Orthodox world that was neither simply Polish nor simply Muscovite. It had its own visual grammar, its own elite sponsors, and its own sacred geography.

The contradiction between patronage and anathema is central to Mazepa's afterlife. How can a man who endowed Orthodox sacred places be remembered as a cursed enemy of Orthodoxy? The answer lies in the fusion of church authority and imperial power. Once Mazepa broke with

Peter, ecclesiastical condemnation became part of the political punishment. The anathema did not erase his previous patronage, but it attempted to govern how that patronage would be remembered. The builder was recoded as betrayer. His stones remained; his name was stained.

This produced a deep instability in sacred memory. The physical landscape could testify to Mazepa's generosity, while official church memory could denounce him. Walls, churches, and monastic structures could preserve the trace of the man whom liturgical-political language condemned. The result was a kind of split memory: material gratitude without permitted honor, architectural presence under verbal curse. Modern restoration of Mazepa's name at the Lavra directly addresses this split.

For Ukrainian memory, Mazepa's patronage is not an incidental defense against the charge of treason. It is part of the positive case for him. He appears as a statesman who invested in the institutions that sustained Ukrainian Orthodox culture. His vision of autonomy was not merely military or diplomatic; it was civilizational. He supported the sacred and intellectual infrastructure through which a people remembers itself. This makes his return to the Lavra symbolically powerful. It presents him not as an invader of sacred space, but as one of its historical patrons.

For Russian-aligned polemic, this is precisely why the Lavra controversy is intolerable. If Mazepa can be publicly honored inside or near a sacred site he helped support, then the imperial reduction of him to traitor weakens. His anathema becomes visible as historical punishment rather than timeless theological truth. His patronage interrupts the claim that loyalty to Moscow and loyalty to Orthodoxy are inseparable. The Lavra thereby becomes not only a monastery, but a court of appeal in the trial of memory.

Mazepa's patronage also complicates the idea of a single uninterrupted Russian Orthodox inheritance. Kyiv's sacred history predates the Moscow Patriarchate and cannot be reduced to later Russian ecclesiastical institutions. The Lavra belongs to the deeper Christian history of the region, and that history is claimed by multiple communities. Mazepa's association with it underscores the distinctiveness of Ukrainian Orthodox culture within the broader Eastern Christian world. He is not a marginal figure artificially inserted into sacred space. He is one of the patrons through whom that space acquired part of its early modern form.

None of this requires denying that Mazepa's political choices were controversial. A patron can also be ambitious. A church builder can also be a strategist. A defender of autonomy can also pursue elite interests. Historical figures are rarely morally simple. But reducing Mazepa to a cursed traitor requires suppressing too much of the evidence of his religious and cultural role. His patronage forces a more difficult question: what happens when a man condemned by

imperial church authority has also helped build the sacred world that authority claims to defend?

The answer is that memory becomes contested at the level of stone. Architecture can preserve what official narratives try to bury. A monastery wall can become an argument. A bust can become a verdict. A name restored to a sacred place can announce that the old imperial curse no longer controls the meaning of the past. This is why Mazepa's patronage is not a minor historical detail. It is the hinge on which the Lavra controversy turns.

2.3 The break with Peter the Great

Mazepa's break with Peter the Great is the central event around which his reputation turns. Before that break, he could be seen as a powerful and loyal hetman within the tsar's orbit. After it, he became a permanent symbol of betrayal in Russian memory and resistance in Ukrainian memory. The same moment created two opposing moral biographies. Everything before 1708 would be reread in light of the choice; everything after would be judged by the outcome.

Peter's reign transformed the political environment in which Mazepa operated. The tsar's military reforms, administrative centralization, demands for service, and imperial ambitions placed increasing pressure on semi-autonomous structures. Peter wanted a state capable of competing with European powers, and that required extracting resources, disciplining elites, and subordinating regional privileges to central command. For the Hetmanate, this meant that earlier guarantees and customary freedoms became less secure. The logic of empire was moving against negotiated autonomy.

Mazepa had long managed this tension through outward loyalty. He received honors, cooperated with Peter, and remained within the tsar's political system. This cooperation is important because it makes the later rupture more meaningful. It was not the act of a lifelong enemy of Moscow. It was the decision of a man who had tried to operate within the system and finally judged that the system threatened the political order he represented. Whether that judgment was principled, strategic, self-interested, or all three remains debated. What matters is that it occurred within a real crisis of autonomy.

The Great Northern War created the opportunity and the danger. Sweden under Charles XII threatened Peter's position and opened the possibility that the balance of power in Eastern Europe might shift. For Mazepa, an alliance with Sweden offered a chance to escape the tightening grip of Peter's state. It also carried enormous risk. If Sweden won, Mazepa might be remembered as a founder or liberator. If Sweden lost, he would be exposed as a traitor to a victorious empire. His gamble depended on military outcomes beyond his control.

Russian imperial memory interprets the break primarily through oath and gratitude. Mazepa had sworn loyalty. He had benefited from Peter's favor. Therefore, his alliance with Sweden was

not merely rebellion but moral monstrosity. In this reading, the violation of personal and political loyalty outweighs any claim about Hetmanate autonomy. The tsar's sovereignty defines the ethical field. Once Peter is assumed to be the legitimate ruler to whom obedience is owed, Mazepa's act can only be treason.

Ukrainian memory begins from a different premise. If the Hetmanate possessed rights, traditions, and political identity that Peter was undermining, then loyalty to the tsar was not absolute. A hetman's duty might include resisting the destruction of the polity he governed. From this perspective, the break with Peter becomes a desperate assertion of political agency. It was not betrayal of the true community, but betrayal of an imperial relationship that had itself become oppressive.

This conflict of premises explains why arguments about Mazepa often seem irresolvable. One side begins with the sanctity of the oath to Peter. The other begins with the threatened autonomy of the Hetmanate. Each side can accuse the other of bad faith because each places the highest obligation in a different location. Was Mazepa bound first to the tsar or to Ukraine? The answer depends on whether one sees Ukraine as a legitimate political subject or as a subordinate territory within a greater imperial order.

The ecclesiastical condemnation of Mazepa intensified the political judgment. By anathematizing him, the imperial order converted political rebellion into spiritual disgrace. This was a powerful act of memory control. It meant that Mazepa would not simply be remembered as a failed rebel. He would be ritually cursed. His name would be marked in religious language, and that marking would echo across generations. The anathema served the state by sacralizing the verdict of treason.

Yet the very need for such condemnation reveals the seriousness of the threat Mazepa posed. Empires do not curse insignificant defectors with lasting fury unless the defection exposes a deeper vulnerability. Mazepa's break suggested that loyalty within the imperial structure was not natural, inevitable, or universally accepted. It revealed that the Hetmanate could imagine another alignment. That possibility had to be morally destroyed after being militarily defeated.

Mazepa's choice also exposed the fragile relationship between personal loyalty and political responsibility. He had personal obligations to Peter, but he also had obligations as hetman. The tragedy of his position is that these obligations became incompatible. Remaining loyal to Peter may have meant assisting the reduction of Hetmanate autonomy. Breaking with Peter meant violating oath, risking devastation, and depending on a foreign ally. There was no morally clean option. Later memory simplified the dilemma because simplification serves politics better than tragedy.

The Swedish alliance itself was not an absurd fantasy. In the context of the Great Northern War, Sweden was a major military power. Charles XII had achieved dramatic successes. For a time, the defeat of Peter seemed plausible. Mazepa's gamble only appears foolish in hindsight because Poltava settled the question. Historical actors do not live in hindsight. They act amid uncertainty, rumor, hope, fear, and incomplete information. To understand Mazepa, one must restore that uncertainty.

At the same time, recognizing the logic of his choice does not require romanticizing it. Mazepa's support among Cossacks was limited and uneven. Many did not follow him. Some feared Swedish alliance, doubted his motives, or remained loyal to Peter. The Hetmanate was not united behind his decision. This internal division matters because it prevents a simplistic nationalist hagiography. Mazepa was not the unanimous voice of a nation. He was a leader making a high-risk decision in a fractured political community.

The break with Peter therefore should be understood as a moment of crystallization. It brought into the open tensions that had been developing for years: autonomy versus centralization, Cossack privilege versus imperial service, Kyivan religious-cultural memory versus Moscow's imperial church order, and frontier diplomacy versus vertical sovereignty. Mazepa did not create these contradictions, but his decision made them visible. That is why his name still carries such force.

2.4 Poltava and the making of a defeated symbol

The Battle of Poltava made Mazepa's memory. Before Poltava, he was a dangerous political actor whose gamble might still succeed. After Poltava, he was a defeated rebel whose enemies possessed the power to define him. Military defeat did not merely end his political project. It gave the victorious empire control over the first durable official narrative. Poltava allowed Peter's state to transform Mazepa from opponent into warning.

Defeat is one of the great engines of symbolic distortion. Victors can portray their enemies as foolish, wicked, doomed, and divinely judged. Losers become available for moral explanation. Why did they fail? Because they were traitors. Because God rejected them. Because they violated rightful order. Because their cause was illegitimate from the beginning. Such explanations are politically useful because they turn contingent military outcomes into proof of moral truth.

For Peter, Poltava was foundational. It confirmed his status as a great power ruler and marked the rise of Russia as a major European military force. The victory helped validate his reforms and imperial ambition. Within that triumphal story, Mazepa had to play the part of the defeated betrayer. His failure demonstrated the futility of resisting the tsar. His condemnation warned other regional elites against imagining alternative futures.

For Ukrainian memory, Poltava became a tragedy of interrupted possibility. The defeat did not prove that Mazepa's cause was meaningless. It proved that the attempt failed. This distinction is crucial. Many national memories are built around defeats that later generations reinterpret as moral victories, warnings, or unfinished tasks. A lost battle can become a seed of identity if it is remembered as evidence that someone once attempted freedom. Mazepa's defeat therefore became available for later recovery as a symbol of anti-imperial aspiration.

The making of a defeated symbol often requires exile, death, and textual afterlife. Mazepa did not remain in power to institutionalize his own version of events. He fled with the Swedish king and died shortly afterward. This left his enemies, rivals, and later interpreters to construct the meaning of his life. The man disappeared; the name remained. That absence created space for legend, denunciation, rehabilitation, and myth.

Poltava also fixed Mazepa within the imperial imagination as a cautionary figure. The lesson was not only that treason fails, but that rebellion against the tsar brings sacred and historical disgrace. The political order could point to him as evidence of what happens when a subordinate elite forgets its place. His name became a tool of discipline. To call someone a Mazepa was to accuse him of betrayal against the rightful center.

The anathema reinforced this lesson. It ensured that Mazepa's defeat was not remembered as ordinary political failure. It was enveloped in religious condemnation. This gave the imperial memory a liturgical or quasi-liturgical durability. Even people who knew little of the Great Northern War could inherit the idea that Mazepa was cursed. The power of such memory lies in its capacity to survive without detailed knowledge. A curse can outlive the circumstances that produced it.

Yet symbols created by defeat can turn against the victors' intended meaning. The same name meant to warn against rebellion can later inspire rebellion. The same anathema meant to erase honor can become evidence of imperial church subordination. The same defeat meant to prove the impossibility of Ukrainian autonomy can become proof that autonomy was once pursued and violently suppressed. This reversal is common in national memory. Empires create martyrs even when they intend to create criminals.

Poltava's symbolic power also depends on its scale. It was not a minor episode but a major battle in European history. It affected the balance of power between Sweden and Russia and helped shape the eighteenth-century order. Mazepa's association with such an event magnified his afterlife. Had he defected in a minor frontier conflict, his memory might have remained local. Because his fate was tied to Poltava, his name entered larger narratives of empire, Europe, and modern state formation.

The battle also linked Mazepa permanently with Peter the Great. This pairing is essential. Peter became the modernizer, empire-builder, and victorious tsar. Mazepa became the traitor, rebel, or failed liberator. Each figure helps define the other. In Russian memory, Peter's greatness is sharpened by Mazepa's treachery. In Ukrainian memory, Mazepa's significance is sharpened by Peter's imperial centralization. They are adversarial symbols in a shared historical drama.

Modern disputes over Mazepa therefore reopen Poltava symbolically. To honor Mazepa is to challenge the imperial verdict that Poltava was final. To curse Mazepa is to reaffirm that verdict. The installation of a bust, the restoration of a name, or the publication of an angry Telegram post are not isolated acts. They are late echoes of the battle's unresolved moral meaning.

The defeated symbol is powerful because it contains both failure and futurity. Mazepa lost. His alliance did not save the Hetmanate. His military gamble failed. His name was cursed. Yet the very persistence of the controversy shows that defeat did not settle the question. If Mazepa were only a failed traitor, he would not provoke such anxiety centuries later. He matters because his defeat did not destroy the possibility he represented.

This is why Poltava remains central to the paper's larger argument. Mazepa's transformation into Mazeppa, comic relic, sacred patron, and propaganda target depends on the initial making of him as a defeated symbol. The name could wander because the man had been violently fixed in memory. Imperial condemnation gave the name its charge. Romantic legend gave it motion. Popular culture gave it absurdity. Modern Ukraine gave it restoration. Russian-aligned propaganda gives it renewed curse. All of these afterlives begin from the fact that Poltava made Mazepa lose politically while making him unforgettable symbolically.

3. The Wild Horse Legend and the Western Mazeppa

The Western Mazeppa is not primarily a statesman. He is an image: a body tied to a horse, stripped, exposed, punished, and hurled across the steppe. This image became more famous than the political career of Ivan Mazepa because it required little explanation. It could be painted, staged, sung, mocked, eroticized, moralized, and remembered. The historical Mazepa needed context: the Hetmanate, Peter the Great, Sweden, Poltava, church patronage, imperial consolidation, and Ukrainian autonomy. The legendary Mazeppa needed only a horse and a scandal.

This shift from Mazepa to Mazeppa is one of the decisive transformations in the name's afterlife. In Eastern Europe, Mazepa remained entangled in questions of loyalty, sovereignty, Orthodoxy, and empire. In Western Europe, Mazeppa became a Romantic spectacle. The legend presented him as a young page or nobleman punished for adultery by being bound naked to a wild horse and sent into the wilderness. The punishment was supposed to annihilate him.

Instead, in many versions, it becomes the ordeal through which he survives, is transformed, and eventually rises to power. The story's appeal lies in this reversal: humiliation becomes destiny.

The horse legend must be treated carefully. It is not reliable biography in any simple sense. Its historical basis is doubtful, and its later popularity depended less on evidence than on dramatic force. But to dismiss it as merely false would miss its importance. Legends do not need to be factual in order to shape cultural memory. A false story can become historically powerful if enough people inherit it, adapt it, and use it. The wild-horse Mazeppa became one of the primary ways Western audiences encountered the name. In that sense, the legend became a historical force even if it was not a historical event.

The scene's power is partly visual. A man tied to a horse is a perfect emblem of loss of control. He cannot steer. He cannot hide. He cannot defend himself. He is carried by forces larger than himself, exposed to the elements and to the gaze of others. This makes him an ideal Romantic figure. Romanticism loved the sublime, the dangerous, the solitary, the excessive, and the border between destruction and transcendence. Mazeppa's body becomes the site where punishment, nature, desire, and fate collide.

The story is also politically suggestive, even when stripped of explicit politics. A rider tied to a wild horse can symbolize the revolutionary, the exile, the rebel, or the man carried by history against his will. The horse may represent passion, nature, punishment, empire, or destiny. Because the image is open-ended, later artists and writers could use it for many purposes. Mazeppa could be sinner, victim, hero, spectacle, animalized body, noble sufferer, or comic absurdity. This flexibility made the legend durable.

The legend also performs a strange conversion of shame into charisma. Its starting point is moral disgrace: illicit love, exposure, and punishment. But the longer the rider survives, the more the moral focus changes. The audience begins not by judging him but by watching him endure. The body that was supposed to be degraded becomes extraordinary. The punishment designed to strip him of honor instead grants him mythic intensity. In this way, Mazeppa joins a broader category of figures whose humiliation becomes the source of their symbolic power.

This is also why the legend could be useful to both admirers and enemies. Admirers could see Mazeppa as a Romantic hero: bound, exiled, nearly destroyed, but unconquered. Enemies could see him as the adulterer and transgressor who deserved disgrace. The same story could elevate or degrade depending on emphasis. If one stresses endurance, Mazeppa becomes heroic. If one stresses adultery and naked punishment, he becomes shameful. Modern polemic often chooses the second emphasis, because humiliation is politically useful.

The Western Mazeppa therefore mediates between the historical Mazepa and later popular culture. It preserves the name but changes its center of gravity. It displaces the Hetmanate with

the steppe, diplomacy with spectacle, and political calculation with bodily ordeal. Once this displacement occurs, the name can travel widely. It can enter poems, operas, paintings, stage performances, burlesque, circus-like entertainment, newspaper cartoons, and eventually American television comedy. The Tulsa Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi is possible because the historical Mazepa had already been transformed into the portable Western Mazeppa.

The wild-horse legend also explains why the name can feel ancient even when detached from meaning. Mazeppa sounds like a name from somewhere else, from a world of costumes, horses, empires, forbidden love, and dangerous landscapes. Even without knowing the story, one hears theatricality in it. This theatrical residue matters. When a comic performer adopts the name, the audience may not know the origin, but the sound carries a faint atmosphere of exotic grandeur. Comedy can then puncture that grandeur, making the name ridiculous precisely because it sounds inflated.

This section examines the legend not to decide whether it is true, but to understand what it made possible. It made Mazepa visible to Western culture as Mazeppa. It converted a contested Ukrainian statesman into a Romantic body. It created an image strong enough to survive into popular entertainment. It supplied later propagandists with a ready-made humiliation myth. And it prepared the ground for the strange journey from Cossack politics to Tulsa comedy.

3.1 The adulterer tied to the horse

The core legend is brutally simple. A young Mazeppa is accused of adultery with a noblewoman. As punishment, he is stripped, bound to a wild horse, and sent away to die. The punishment is public, sexualized, and symbolic. It does not merely seek to kill him. It seeks to degrade him. Nakedness removes rank. Binding removes agency. The horse removes control. The wilderness removes community. The adulterer is not executed cleanly; he is transformed into a spectacle of dishonor.

This is why the Telegram-style insult still works centuries later. To say that Mazepa was tied naked to a wild horse is to invoke not an argument but an image of shame. The listener is invited to see him as morally and physically exposed. The political figure disappears behind the punished body. The charge of adultery becomes a way to contaminate all later claims about statecraft, church patronage, and autonomy. Before Mazepa can be considered as hetman, he is made ridiculous as a naked sinner.

The legend's sexual dimension is important. Adultery is not merely private misconduct in the symbolic world of the story. It is betrayal at the intimate level. The adulterer violates household, hierarchy, marriage, and honor. This private betrayal can then be made to foreshadow public betrayal. The man who violates a marriage bed becomes the man who violates an oath to the tsar. The myth therefore supports later political condemnation by giving Mazepa a

characterological flaw. He is not merely said to have made one controversial decision; he is portrayed as a man whose entire nature is treacherous.

The punishment also belongs to a culture of aristocratic honor. The offended husband or lord does not simply punish the lover; he stages humiliation. Mazeppa is made passive, feminized, animalized, and expelled. His body is used as the surface on which the social order writes its judgment. The horse becomes an instrument of dishonor, but also of narrative motion. Without the horse, the story would be a bedroom scandal. With the horse, it becomes epic.

The choice of horse is symbolically rich. A horse normally implies nobility, mobility, command, and martial skill. A rider controls a horse. A warrior, nobleman, or Cossack leader is imagined mounted. But in the legend, that relationship is inverted. Mazeppa is not the rider but the captive. He is attached to the horse without command. The animal carries him, but he does not govern it. This inversion transforms a symbol of status into a symbol of helplessness.

Yet the inversion does not remain stable. Because Mazeppa survives, the horse becomes more than a punishment. It becomes the vehicle of transformation. The animal meant to destroy him carries him into another destiny. The very loss of control becomes part of a larger narrative of emergence. This is why the legend could become Romantic rather than merely moralistic. The punished adulterer becomes the man who passes through extremity and lives.

The nakedness of Mazeppa also produces interpretive tension. On one level, nakedness is shame. It marks loss of social identity. On another, it reveals the body as elemental. Romantic art often found power in the stripped human form placed against nature. The naked rider becomes vulnerable but also iconic. He is reduced to flesh, but flesh in extremity can become sublime. This makes the image both degrading and elevating.

The landscape intensifies the ordeal. The steppe is not a domestic or civilized space. It is open, dangerous, vast, and indifferent. It strips away the social world that condemned him. Once Mazeppa is carried into that space, he leaves behind the court of adultery and enters the realm of myth. The story changes from scandal to survival. The wilderness becomes a second judge, and unlike society, it may grant him transformation rather than merely punishment.

The legend's simplicity also made it easy to detach from historical specificity. Audiences did not need to know which noblewoman, which lord, which court, or which documents supported the tale. The scene was enough. It could be retold without footnotes because it operated at the level of archetype: forbidden desire, punitive exposure, wild nature, near-death, and return. This made Mazeppa available to cultures far removed from Ukraine.

The adulterer legend also served as a moral technology. It taught that passion without order leads to disgrace. Yet because the disgraced man survives, it also taught that vitality may outlast social judgment. This double lesson made it attractive to artists. Conservative readers could see

punishment for sin. Romantic readers could see the birth of a hero. Popular audiences could see spectacle. Satirists could see absurdity. Propagandists could see a weapon.

The connection between adultery and treason deserves special attention. Both involve violated loyalty. Both can be narrated as betrayal of a rightful bond. Both invite theatrical punishment. In Russian imperial memory, Mazepa's break with Peter could be framed as political adultery: unfaithfulness to the sovereign who had favored him. The wild-horse legend then becomes a metaphorical prehistory of treason. It says, in effect, that Mazepa was always the sort of man who betrays.

This is historically dangerous because it collapses biography into moral essence. Once a person is assigned an essence, evidence becomes secondary. Every act is interpreted through the prior stain. Patronage becomes hypocrisy. Diplomacy becomes intrigue. Resistance becomes treason. Even sacred building can be dismissed because the man has already been defined as corrupt. The legend thus helps create a totalizing caricature.

At the same time, the legend can be reclaimed. If one stresses survival rather than shame, Mazeppa becomes a figure of endurance against cruel punishment. He is bound by enemies, cast into the wilderness, and expected to die, yet he lives. In this reading, the horse ordeal foreshadows the fate of Ukraine itself: bound by hostile powers, driven through violence, exposed to humiliation, yet surviving. This symbolic reversal is one reason the name remains unstable. The same image can wound or inspire.

The adulterer tied to the horse is therefore not a minor anecdote. It is the central visual myth through which Western Mazeppa was made. It condensed sexuality, punishment, aristocratic honor, wilderness, motion, and survival into one scene. That scene later detached from history and entered cultural circulation as a portable symbol. Whether used for art, mockery, theater, or propaganda, it retained its power because it reached the imagination before it reached the intellect.

3.2 From biography to Romantic myth

The movement from Mazepa's biography to the Romantic myth of Mazeppa reveals how culture transforms political figures into symbolic bodies. Biography is dense, contradictory, and slow. Myth is compressed, memorable, and mobile. Ivan Mazepa's real career required knowledge of early modern Eastern Europe. The Romantic Mazeppa required only a single ordeal. This compression made the name available to a much wider audience.

Romanticism favored figures who exceeded ordinary social limits. The rebel, the exile, the wanderer, the doomed lover, the solitary sufferer, and the man at war with fate all belonged naturally to its imagination. Mazeppa fit this world perfectly once his political identity was

displaced by the horse legend. He was passionate, punished, isolated, bound, and carried through a sublime landscape. He appeared to be both victim and force of nature.

The Romantic myth changes the moral emphasis of the story. In a strictly moralistic version, Mazeppa is punished for adultery and serves as a warning. In a Romantic version, punishment becomes initiation. The sufferer is not merely guilty; he is extraordinary. His ordeal reveals intensity of life. His survival implies destiny. The social world condemns him, but nature tests him. If he survives nature, he returns with a different kind of legitimacy.

This transformation is characteristic of Romantic art. Romanticism often took figures condemned by conventional morality and reimagined them as bearers of deeper vitality. The outlaw, the fallen angel, the revolutionary, the pirate, the blasphemer, and the doomed lover all became fascinating because they stood outside ordinary discipline. Mazeppa's transgression made him available for condemnation, but also for fascination. The very stain intensified the aura.

The horse ride also suited Romantic ideas of the sublime. The sublime is not mere beauty. It involves terror, vastness, danger, and the mind's confrontation with forces beyond control. Mazeppa's ride across the steppe stages this confrontation in bodily form. He is not contemplating nature from a safe distance. He is bound to it. He is dragged through it. He cannot master it, yet he survives it. His body becomes the site where the sublime is endured rather than merely observed.

The steppe in the Western imagination functioned as a space of wildness and otherness. It was not the cultivated landscape of Western Europe. It suggested open horizons, barbaric energy, frontier violence, nomadic motion, and imperial distance. This made it an ideal setting for Romantic projection. Mazeppa's Ukraine was not primarily a real society in the Western myth; it was a landscape of intensity through which the European imagination could explore passion and fate.

In this transformation, Ukraine itself became partly mythologized. The real political and cultural world of the Hetmanate receded. The land became a stage for the hero's ordeal. This is one of the costs of Romantic attention. It made the name famous but often obscured the people, institutions, and conflicts that gave the historical Mazepa meaning. Western culture remembered the horse more readily than the Hetmanate.

The myth also altered time. Biography unfolds chronologically, with causes, negotiations, alliances, and consequences. Myth organizes time around revelation. The horse ride becomes the decisive moment, the event that reveals who Mazeppa is. Everything before it becomes prelude; everything after it becomes destiny. Such mythic time is powerful because it simplifies character. It tells audiences that one ordeal discloses the essence of a life.

The Romantic Mazeppa thus became a figure of involuntary motion. He is bound, but moving. Powerless, but unstoppable. Humiliated, but unforgettable. This paradox gave artists a rich subject. The body is passive, yet the image is dynamic. The rider cannot act, yet the scene is filled with action. Such paradox is more compelling than a straightforward heroic pose. Mazeppa's power comes precisely from his lack of control.

This also made the myth adaptable to political readings. A nation under empire can be imagined as Mazeppa: bound by hostile forces and dragged through historical violence. A revolutionary can be imagined as Mazeppa: condemned by the old order but carried toward a future. A sinner can be imagined as Mazeppa: punished but transformed. A modern subject can be imagined as Mazeppa: strapped to forces of technology, war, or history beyond individual control. The myth's structure is flexible because it is built around the relation between constraint and motion.

The Romantic myth did not simply beautify the story. It also intensified its erotic charge. The naked bound body became an object of aesthetic attention. Punishment and display merge uneasily. The viewer is invited to pity, judge, admire, and gaze. This ambiguity helped the legend pass into theatrical and popular forms, where spectacle often mattered more than moral interpretation. The story could be elevated as art or lowered into sensational entertainment without losing its central appeal.

As Mazeppa became a subject for poetry, music, painting, and theater, the name gained cultural prestige. It became recognizable beyond specialists in Eastern European history. This prestige then made parody possible. One cannot effectively parody what no one has heard of. The later comic uses of Mazeppa depend on the prior seriousness of the Romantic myth. Comedy feeds on inherited grandeur, especially when that grandeur has become vague.

The transition from biography to Romantic myth also shows how Western culture often consumes Eastern European history. Complex borderland politics are converted into images of passion, wilderness, and fate. This is not unique to Mazepa, but his case is unusually clear. The political problem of Ukrainian autonomy under imperial pressure becomes the aesthetic problem of a bound body on a horse. The transformation brings fame at the cost of simplification.

Yet simplification is not the same as disappearance. The name remained alive because Romantic myth gave it new energy. Without the legend, Ivan Mazepa might have remained primarily a regional historical figure known to specialists and national memory. With the legend, Mazeppa entered the broader European imagination. That entry made later comic and propagandistic afterlives possible. The distortion preserved the name, even as it changed its meaning.

This is the central irony. The Western Mazeppa is historically unreliable, yet culturally indispensable. It misdirects attention from the real Mazepa, but it also keeps the name circulating. It converts politics into spectacle, but spectacle becomes a vessel through which fragments of history survive. By the time the name appears in a comic strip or Tulsa television, the historical content has thinned dramatically. But the sound remains charged because Romantic myth once filled it with horses, scandal, and sublime motion.

3.3 Erotic spectacle and theatrical afterlife

The Mazeppa legend was almost designed for the stage. Its central image is physical, sensational, and immediately legible. A bound rider, a wild horse, a punishment for illicit love, a dangerous journey across the landscape: these elements require no elaborate exposition. They offer movement, danger, body, costume, exposure, and suspense. It is easy to see why the story passed from literature into theatrical and popular entertainment.

Theatrical culture thrives on images that can be understood at a distance. Mazeppa's ordeal offered exactly that. The audience did not need to hear every word to grasp the scene. A body bound to a horse communicates helplessness. A racing animal communicates danger. Nakedness or near-nakedness communicates shame and erotic exposure. The spectacle is readable before it is interpreted. This made Mazeppa a valuable subject for performance.

The erotic element was central to this theatrical afterlife. The story begins with illicit desire and proceeds to bodily exposure. Even when the performance avoided literal nakedness, it could suggest it through costume, staging, posture, vulnerability, and the gaze of the audience. The punishment that was supposed to shame Mazeppa became, in performance, an opportunity to display the body. Moral condemnation and erotic fascination became inseparable.

This uneasy mixture allowed Mazeppa to move between high and low culture. In elite forms, the story could be treated as tragic, sublime, musical, or painterly. In popular forms, it could become sensational, burlesque, melodramatic, or comic. The same premise served both opera and parody because it contained both grandeur and absurdity. A man tied to a horse is terrifying in one register and ridiculous in another. The shift between those registers is small.

The theater also transformed Mazeppa by making the horse practical. A real or simulated horse on stage became a technical challenge and attraction. Audiences could be drawn by the promise of motion, danger, and illusion. The question was not only what the story meant, but how the performance would manage the ride. This gave the legend a mechanical and spectacular dimension. Mazeppa became not only a character but a staging problem.

Popular entertainment often magnifies whatever is most visible. In Mazeppa's case, that meant the horse, the body, and the peril. Political background disappeared almost entirely. The audience came for the ordeal. The historical hetman was replaced by a theatrical device. Once

this happened, the name could be used for any scene of comic or dangerous binding to an animal. The path from wild horse to donkey gag was already open.

This helps explain the 1902 comic-strip fragment that later fed Tulsa's Dr. Mazeppa. A joke about trying to "play Mazeppa" with a boy tied to a donkey only works if Mazeppa had already become shorthand for a recognizable spectacle. The comic did not need to explain the Great Northern War. It needed only the residual idea: Mazeppa means someone tied to an animal. By reducing the wild horse to a donkey and the tragic rider to a fat child, the comic strip converted Romantic spectacle into slapstick.

This reduction is culturally important. It shows the process by which high myths decay into jokes. The decay is not simply loss. It is also transmission. A child in an old comic strip tied to a donkey may seem far removed from Ivan Mazepa, but it preserves a structural remnant of the legend. Binding, animal, humiliation, motion: the elements remain, but the tone has changed completely. The heroic sufferer becomes a comic victim. The sublime steppe becomes the page of a newspaper cartoon.

Burlesque and parody depend on this kind of inherited seriousness. The more solemn the original, the more available it becomes for comic lowering. Mazeppa's theatrical grandeur made him vulnerable to mockery. The name sounded elevated; the premise was visually extreme; the eroticism could be exaggerated or deflated. Popular culture could therefore enjoy both the memory of grandeur and its collapse.

The erotic spectacle also shaped gendered performance. In some theatrical traditions, the Mazeppa role became associated with the display of bodies in ways that shifted audience attention away from the male historical figure and toward spectacle itself. The legend's structure permitted cross-gender performance, costuming, and voyeuristic appeal. This further detached the name from biography. Mazeppa became not a person but a theatrical situation.

Theatrical afterlife often changes moral judgment. In performance, the audience may not care whether Mazeppa deserved punishment. The spectacle of suffering overtakes the ethics of the plot. Once the rider is bound and the horse begins, the viewer's attention moves from sin to survival. This shift weakens the moralizing frame and strengthens the sensational one. The adulterer becomes a performer of endurance.

This is one reason later propaganda must reassert the moral accusation so forcefully. If Mazeppa is left to Romantic or theatrical memory, he may become fascinating rather than disgraceful. To use the legend as denunciation, the polemicist must remind the audience that he was an adulterer, a sinner, a man punished for shameful conduct. The theatrical tradition tends to aestheticize him; propaganda seeks to re-moralize him.

At the same time, spectacle can serve propaganda. A humiliating image travels faster than a complex argument. To say “tied naked to a wild horse” is to stage a miniature theater in the mind of the reader. The Telegram post uses precisely this theatrical economy. It does not need to prove the historical tale. It needs the image to work. The image works because centuries of literature, theater, art, and popular retelling have made it vivid.

The theatrical afterlife also prepared the name for American reception. American popular culture has long absorbed European legends through performance, cartoons, circus, vaudeville, horror hosting, and regional television. Names detached from their original languages and histories become raw material for persona. Mazeppa, by the time it reached Tulsa, was no longer a Ukrainian political name in any strong sense. It was a theatrical remnant available for comic reanimation.

Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi belongs to this late stage of the theatrical afterlife. The name suggests a mysterious foreign magician, perhaps a decadent aristocrat, perhaps a fake scholar, perhaps a carnival master of ceremonies. Its power lies in not being fully understood. It sounds like a name with a past, and that vague past gives the comic persona texture. The historical content is mostly gone, but the theatrical residue remains.

This is how cultural memory often reaches popular audiences: not through accurate instruction, but through fragments embedded in entertainment. A poem becomes a stage show. A stage show becomes a cartoon joke. A cartoon joke becomes the source of a local TV name. A local TV name becomes nostalgic folklore. Then a modern political controversy reactivates the historical root, making the comic fragment suddenly meaningful again. The chain is improbable, but not accidental. It follows the logic of spectacle.

Mazeppa’s erotic and theatrical afterlife therefore sits between Romantic myth and comic mutation. It lowered the legend into popular forms without destroying it. It made the name familiar enough to be parodied and strange enough to remain memorable. It preserved the horse ordeal as a cultural shorthand. And it set the stage for the Tulsa transformation, where the solemn rider finally became the absurd doctor of late-night television.

3.4 The myth as propaganda material

The wild-horse myth is useful to propaganda because it performs character assassination instantly. It does not require a careful account of Mazepa’s policies, alliances, patronage, or political context. It begins by placing him in a scene of sexual shame and bodily humiliation. Once the audience has accepted that image, the rest of the condemnation becomes easier. The adulterer becomes the traitor. The punished lover becomes the cursed rebel. The man tied to a horse becomes the man unworthy of honor.

Propaganda prefers images that compress judgment. The wild-horse story does exactly that. It turns a historical dispute into a moral tableau. A naked man tied to an animal is already defeated in the imagination. He is exposed, ridiculous, powerless, and guilty. The image pre-answers the question of whether he deserves respect. It invites contempt before analysis begins.

This is especially useful in the case of Mazepa because the historical record is inconveniently complex. He was not merely a rebel. He was a ruler, diplomat, patron, builder, and participant in the politics of a frontier polity under imperial pressure. Such complexity slows outrage. The horse myth accelerates it. It gives polemic a shortcut around historical difficulty. Why discuss the status of the Hetmanate when one can invoke adultery, nakedness, and punishment?

The myth also connects private sin to public treason. This is one of its strongest propagandistic functions. A political adversary becomes more dangerous when portrayed as morally corrupt in every sphere. If Mazepa betrayed a husband, he could betray a tsar. If he violated the order of the household, he could violate the order of empire. If he was punished for lust, his later politics can be interpreted as another expression of the same lawless character. The myth creates continuity between sexual disorder and political rebellion.

Such continuity is rhetorically powerful but historically suspect. Human beings do not become intelligible through one alleged scandal. Political decisions cannot be reduced to moral gossip. Yet propaganda works by reducing complexity to essence. It seeks the one story that defines the person permanently. The wild-horse myth provides that defining stain. Once attached to Mazepa, it can be repeated whenever his memory threatens imperial narratives.

The myth is also useful because it is memorable. A reader may forget dates, battles, treaties, and ecclesiastical details. He will not forget the horse. Propaganda relies on this asymmetry. The most vivid image often defeats the most accurate explanation. A false or doubtful legend can outcompete documented history because it is easier to remember and more satisfying to repeat. The wild-horse Mazeppa has this mnemonic advantage.

The Telegram denunciation of Mazepa at the Lavra demonstrates this mechanism. The message begins not with the Hetmanate, not with Cossack autonomy, not with Mazepa's church patronage, but with shame. It identifies him as the adulterer made infamous by naked punishment. Then it adds ingratitude, oath-breaking, alliance with Sweden, anathema, and betrayal. The sequence matters. Sexual humiliation prepares the ground for political and spiritual condemnation.

The myth also helps sacralize the accusation. Once Mazepa is presented as morally filthy, his presence in a holy place can be framed as desecration. The outrage does not depend only on his alliance with Sweden. It depends on the total image of a corrupted man being honored in

sacred space. The wild-horse legend thus supports the claim that placing Mazepa at the Lavra is not historical restoration but sacrilege.

This is where propaganda merges with religious nationalism. A political opponent is not simply wrong; he is unclean. A monument is not simply controversial; it is defilement. A historical reinterpretation is not simply revision; it is an attack on the holy. Such rhetoric transforms memory disputes into spiritual warfare. The dead Mazepa becomes a demonized object through which living enemies can be accused of blasphemy.

The myth's propagandistic value also depends on repetition across centuries. Because Mazeppa was already famous in European culture, modern polemic can pretend it is invoking common knowledge rather than contested legend. The phrase "made infamous" suggests that the case is closed, that everyone knows what kind of man he was. This appeal to inherited notoriety saves the propagandist from having to prove the tale. Fame becomes evidence.

Yet fame is not evidence. A legend can be famous because it is dramatic, not because it is true. The wild-horse story circulated because it was narratively powerful. Its usefulness as art and spectacle does not make it reliable as biography. Propaganda exploits this confusion. It takes cultural familiarity and converts it into moral certainty.

The same mechanism appears in the use of anathema. The ecclesiastical curse is invoked as though it were a timeless theological verdict independent of political context. But the anathema followed Mazepa's break with Peter and belongs to a world in which church and imperial power were deeply entangled. To cite it without context is to allow the victorious empire's religious-political punishment to define the man forever. Propaganda prefers that frozen verdict because it eliminates the need to revisit the circumstances.

The wild-horse myth and the anathema reinforce each other. One humiliates the body; the other condemns the soul. One belongs to erotic legend; the other to ecclesiastical-political judgment. Together they produce a total image of disgrace. The man is shameful in flesh and cursed in spirit. Once that total image is established, honoring him can be described as an attack on sacred order itself.

But the myth is unstable. It can also be turned against the propagandist. If Mazeppa is read as the bound sufferer who survives unjust punishment, then the image can support Ukrainian endurance rather than Russian condemnation. If the horse is history, and the binding is imperial violence, then Mazepa becomes less a sinner than a figure dragged through ordeal by hostile powers. The very image intended to shame him can be reinterpreted as a symbol of survival.

This instability is why the myth remains contested. Propaganda wants fixed meaning, but myths rarely remain fixed. The more powerful the image, the more available it is for reversal. The naked rider can be degraded, eroticized, sanctified, mocked, or heroicized. The same story can

support imperial contempt, Romantic admiration, theatrical spectacle, or national allegory. No single use can fully exhaust it.

The myth also reveals the emotional structure of anti-Mazepa rhetoric. The hatred is not only political. It is aesthetic, sexual, religious, and imperial. Mazepa is hated as ugly disorder: lust against marriage, rebellion against sovereign, Ukraine against Moscow, local memory against imperial continuity. By invoking the horse legend, the polemicist draws all these disorders into one image of punishment. The desired outcome is restoration of control: the adulterer bound, the traitor cursed, the statue removed, Kyiv "liberated."

This is why the myth's reappearance in modern wartime rhetoric is not accidental. In periods of conflict, societies reach for old symbolic weapons. Names like Mazepa are valuable because they already carry accumulated charge. The propagandist does not need to invent a new villain. He can resurrect an old one, attach him to current enemies, and present the present war as continuation of an older sacred-political struggle.

The wild-horse legend therefore belongs not only to literary history but to the technology of propaganda. It demonstrates how image can defeat context, how sexual shame can support political accusation, how legend can masquerade as evidence, and how inherited cultural memory can be reactivated during war. It also shows why careful historical writing matters. Without such care, the most vivid myth becomes the public truth.

In the larger journey from Mazepa to Mazeppa to Dr. Mazeppa and back to Mazepa at the Lavra, the wild-horse myth is the hinge. It detached the name from its original political world, made it portable, and filled it with spectacular energy. That energy could become art, comedy, or propaganda. The same horse that carried Mazeppa across the Romantic steppe continues to carry the name through modern media, sometimes as joke, sometimes as curse, and sometimes as a symbol still struggling to escape the hands that bound it.

4. Tulsa's Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi and American Comic Mutation

By the time the name Mazeppa arrived in Tulsa television culture, it had already passed through several transformations. It had begun as the name of Ivan Mazepa, the Cossack hetman whose life was bound to the political struggle between the Hetmanate, Muscovy, Sweden, and empire. It had become Mazeppa in Western Romantic legend, where the historical man was largely replaced by the unforgettable image of the punished rider tied to a wild horse. It had then descended into theater, burlesque, illustration, parody, and comic strips, where the grand suffering of the Romantic hero could be reduced to slapstick. Tulsa's Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi belongs to this late stage of cultural transmission. He is not a historical Mazepa. He is not even a

straightforward Western Mazeppa. He is the comic fossil of a myth that had traveled so far from its origin that it could be reborn as local American absurdity.

This does not make him trivial. On the contrary, Dr. Mazeppa reveals how deeply cultural fragments can survive after losing their original explanation. The audience did not need to know Ivan Mazepa, the Cossack Hetmanate, Peter the Great, Poltava, Byron, or European theatrical spectacle in order for “Mazeppa” to work as a comic name. The name sounded foreign, inflated, old, theatrical, and ridiculous. It carried an atmosphere without requiring comprehension. That is exactly how popular culture often preserves old symbols: not as accurate knowledge, but as charged residue.

Tulsa’s Mazeppa therefore represents a specifically American form of cultural mutation. European history entered American entertainment not through academic study, but through scraps, jokes, cartoons, costumes, accents, monster movies, and local broadcasting. The old-world name became material for improvisation. It was severed from solemn national memory and reattached to late-night humor. Where Russian imperial memory had cursed Mazepa, and Romantic culture had eroticized Mazeppa, Tulsa made him funny.

This shift is more significant than it may first appear. Comedy is one of the ways culture disarms inherited grandeur. A name associated with betrayal, punishment, and sublime suffering becomes the name of a television host presiding over horror films and comic sketches. The tragic rider is not refuted; he is deflated. The body tied to the horse becomes, at a further remove, a boy tied to a donkey in an old comic strip, and then a television persona with a deliberately absurd title. The solemnity of the original is not destroyed all at once. It is progressively lowered through popular forms.

Yet this lowering also preserves. Had Mazeppa remained only a historical or literary reference, it might have stayed within specialist circles. Because it entered popular entertainment, it survived in unexpected places. Tulsa’s Dr. Mazeppa was not an accurate guardian of Mazepa’s history, but he helped keep the sound of the name alive in an American regional memory. A viewer who had never heard of Ivan Mazepa might still remember Mazeppa Pompazoidi. Decades later, when the Ukrainian Mazepa returned to the news through the Lavra controversy, the Tulsa memory could suddenly reconnect with its deeper root.

The figure of Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi also belongs to the world of horror hosting, a genre that itself mixes parody, ritual, and local charisma. The horror host stands between the audience and the strange film. He introduces, interrupts, mocks, interprets, and domesticates the uncanny. He is a master of ceremonies for low-budget dread. This role is already close to the carnival priest, the comic shaman, the fake professor, and the stage magician. The name Mazeppa, with its theatrical old-world echo, suited such a role perfectly.

In Tulsa, the name did not operate as a nationalist emblem. It operated as a mask. Dr. Mazeppa was a persona into which Gailard Sartain could pour improvisational wit, visual strangeness, local references, and countercultural energy. The historical charge of the name had become available as sound and costume. This is one of the final stages in the secular migration of sacred or political symbols. They become masks worn by entertainers who may not carry the original quarrel but inherit its atmosphere.

The Tulsa mutation is therefore not a detour from the paper's argument. It is the center of the paper's comparative force. Without Tulsa, the study would remain a familiar account of Mazepa as contested Ukrainian-Russian memory and Western Romantic myth. With Tulsa, the name's journey becomes stranger and more revealing. It shows that cultural transmission is not linear, respectable, or controlled. A hetman can become a poem. A poem can become a stage act. A stage act can become a comic strip. A comic strip can become a Tulsa horror host. A Tulsa horror host can become the unexpected American cousin of a modern Lavra controversy.

4.1 Gailard Sartain and the Tulsa television world

Gailard Sartain's Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi emerged from a media world very different from today's centralized digital platforms. Regional television once had room for local eccentricity. Stations needed programming, personalities, continuity, and inexpensive entertainment. Out of those needs came figures who were not polished national celebrities but local presences: hosts, comedians, announcers, weather personalities, children's performers, horror hosts, and improvisers whose connection to the audience was intimate because it was geographically specific. Dr. Mazeppa belonged to that world.

Tulsa television in this period was not merely a smaller version of national television. It had its own ecology. Local performers could develop characters that might have been too strange, rough, experimental, or regionally specific for network approval. They could mix community references, improvised humor, low-budget theatricality, and direct address to viewers. The lack of polish was part of the charm. It created the sense that television was not only something transmitted from distant centers, but something happening nearby, almost within the same social world as the audience.

Sartain's later career shows that he was not merely a local oddity. He became known nationally as an actor, comedian, and visual artist. But Dr. Mazeppa belongs especially to the Tulsa moment, before national recognition fully absorbed him. The character carried the energy of a performer inventing within constraints. Limited resources often produce more memorable style than abundance. Costumes, names, voices, gestures, and absurd premises have to do the work that expensive production cannot. Mazeppa Pompazoidi was such a creation: a name and persona strong enough to generate a world around itself.

The horror-host format gave Sartain an ideal frame. Horror hosts often exist in parody relation to the films they present. They borrow the atmosphere of monsters, laboratories, castles, séances, graveyards, mad doctors, occult scholars, and carnival barkers, but they undercut it with jokes. The host is both inside and outside the horror world. He invokes mystery while mocking it. Dr. Mazeppa's name fits this double movement. It sounds like a mysterious European authority and a joke at the same time.

The title "Doctor" is important. It gives the character mock authority. A doctor may be a scholar, scientist, occult expert, medical quack, or mad experimenter. Attached to "Mazeppa Pompazoidi," the title becomes comic credentialing. It suggests that this ridiculous person has some kind of institutional or esoteric standing. The humor depends on the mismatch between title and absurdity. The viewer is asked to accept an obviously fake authority figure as master of ceremonies.

The old-world sound of Mazeppa also contributes to this mock authority. Names from Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Russia, or imagined "foreign" spaces have often been used in American entertainment to suggest mystery, danger, intellectualism, decadence, or occult power. In Dr. Mazeppa, this tendency is parodied rather than simply repeated. The character does not claim sober ethnic realism. He turns the exoticized name into theatrical nonsense. The old-world echo becomes part of the joke.

Sartain's artistic background likely mattered. A visual artist understands that a character is not only lines spoken but silhouette, lettering, costume, posture, and atmosphere. The name "Mazeppa Pompazoidi" is almost graphic. It looks strange on the page and sounds stranger aloud. It gives the performer permission to be excessive. A plain name would not have opened the same comic space. The character needed a name large enough to be punctured continuously by performance.

Tulsa audiences also mattered. Local comedy depends on a shared field of recognition. The audience knows that the performance is artificial, but it also knows that it belongs to them. Dr. Mazeppa was not simply a generic horror host who could have been dropped into any market unchanged. He became part of Tulsa memory because he was experienced locally, repeatedly, and socially. People watched, quoted, remembered, and passed the memory along. The name became not only a persona but a community marker.

This local belonging distinguishes Dr. Mazeppa from the older European Mazeppa. The Romantic rider belonged to the imagined steppe, the theater, and transnational high culture. Tulsa's Mazeppa belonged to a broadcast region. He was mediated by living rooms, television sets, local schedules, and the rituals of watching strange films with a familiar host. The vast steppe had

shrunk into a studio. The wild horse had become a comic atmosphere. The myth had been domesticated without being entirely emptied.

The Tulsa television world also allowed for hybrid tones. Dr. Mazeppa could be silly, uncanny, satirical, childish, adult, local, and bizarre at once. This tonal mixture resembles the longer history of the Mazeppa name, which had already moved among tragedy, eroticism, spectacle, parody, and ridicule. Sartain may not have intended to carry all that history, but the chosen name made such hybridity natural. Mazeppa had always been unstable. Tulsa simply gave that instability a new stage.

In this sense, Gailard Sartain did not invent from nothing. He performed within a cultural compost heap. Old cartoons, literary fragments, horror conventions, mock scholarship, revival-meeting cadence, local television improvisation, and American comic timing all fed the character. The genius of the persona lay in arranging these fragments into something immediately memorable. Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi did not need to explain himself. He arrived as if he had always existed somewhere in the basement of culture.

This is why the character deserves a place in a paper about Mazepa. Sartain's Mazeppa shows what happens when a historical name survives not through official commemoration but through comic afterlife. Monuments preserve names in bronze. Television preserves names in memory, laughter, and repetition. The Lavra bust and the Tulsa horror host are obviously not the same kind of memorial, but both demonstrate that names become powerful when they attach to ritual performance. One ritual is sacred-national; the other is comic-local. Both give the name a body.

4.2 The 1902 comic-strip origin story

The reported origin of Dr. Mazeppa's name is one of the most revealing details in the entire chain of transmission. Sartain did not apparently choose the name by studying Ivan Mazepa or by deciding to parody the Cossack hetman. He found "Mazeppa" in an old comic-strip title involving boys trying to "play Mazeppa" with a child tied to a donkey. This is a perfect example of cultural memory surviving as slapstick residue.

The comic-strip source matters because it proves that, by the early twentieth century, Mazeppa had already become a recognizable popular reference detached from serious history. A cartoonist could assume that the idea of "playing Mazeppa" meant something like tying someone to an animal in imitation of a known legend or stage image. The joke depended on the reduction of the grand horse ordeal to childish mischief. The wild horse became a donkey. The heroic or erotic sufferer became a comic child. The Romantic sublime became playground cruelty.

This reduction did not happen by accident. It followed the logic of popular culture. Once a dramatic image becomes famous, it becomes available for parody. The more intense the original, the easier it is to deflate. The Mazeppa legend was already excessive: nakedness, adultery, punishment, wild motion, and survival. A comic strip could puncture the excess simply by miniaturizing it. Children playing at Mazeppa convert high drama into low farce.

The phrase “play Mazeppa” is especially important. It means that Mazeppa had become an activity as well as a name. To “play” Mazeppa was to reenact the central image of the legend, not to study the historical figure. This is cultural compression at its strongest. An entire career, legend, and theatrical tradition becomes a game: tie someone to an animal. When a name becomes a verb-like activity, it has entered popular consciousness deeply enough to be used casually.

This also shows how children’s culture and comic strips can preserve adult cultural references in altered form. A child reading or viewing the strip may not know the original Mazeppa, but the joke carries the structure forward. Popular media often transmits fragments in precisely this way. The fragment may be misunderstood, but it remains available for future recovery. Sartain’s later discovery of the deeper horse legend demonstrates this process. He first encountered the name as comic residue, then later learned that the residue had a history.

The donkey is symbolically perfect. The horse in the Romantic legend is sublime, powerful, dangerous, and beautiful. The donkey is stubborn, comic, humble, and ridiculous. Replacing the horse with a donkey immediately lowers the myth. The punishment no longer evokes terrifying motion across the steppe. It evokes backyard slapstick. This is the cultural path from epic to cartoon: change the animal, change the scale, change the tone, keep the structure.

The child tied to the donkey also reverses the erotic charge of the earlier legend. The adult adulterer’s naked exposure becomes childish vulnerability and comic bodily mishap. The scandal disappears, but the humiliation remains. This is another way popular culture sanitizes and preserves. It removes the sexual content while retaining the spectacle of someone bound to an animal. The result is safe enough for a comic strip but still recognizably derived from the older myth.

Sartain’s attraction to the name likely depended on its sound as much as its source. “Mazeppa” is phonetic theater. It has sharpness, rhythm, and a faintly exotic weight. It sounds like a name one could shout, announce, or place on a poster. It is both grand and silly. The comic strip gave Sartain permission to treat it as humorous rather than reverent. He did not inherit Mazepa through solemn historical memory. He inherited Mazeppa as already comic.

This is a crucial distinction for the article’s argument. Tulsa’s Mazeppa is not direct appropriation of Ukrainian history. It is appropriation of an already transformed Western popular artifact. The

path is indirect: Mazepa the hetman becomes Mazeppa the legend; Mazeppa the legend becomes Mazeppa the theatrical spectacle; Mazeppa the spectacle becomes a comic-strip gag; the comic-strip gag gives Sartain a name. By the time the name reaches Tulsa, it has passed through enough filters to become culturally orphaned.

Yet orphaned does not mean empty. Cultural orphans often carry hidden ancestry. The name still contains the echo of the horse legend, and behind that the echo of Mazepa. When Sartain later learned about the poem and the man tied to the horse, he encountered the buried ancestry of the comic fragment. That moment of retrospective discovery is itself part of the story. It shows how popular culture can lead backward into history, even when it begins in absurdity.

The 1902 comic-strip origin also helps explain the spelling “Mazeppa.” The Westernized form had already become the standard vehicle of the legend in English-language popular culture. Sartain inherited that form, not the Ukrainian “Mazepa.” The spelling therefore marks the character as a descendant of the Western mythic and theatrical tradition, not of the Ukrainian historical-political tradition directly. The doubled consonant is a signpost in the genealogy.

The comic-strip chain also highlights the difference between memory and scholarship. Scholarship tries to reconstruct origins, evidence, chronology, and context. Popular memory preserves what can be repeated. “A Cossack hetman who allied with Sweden against Peter the Great in 1708” is not easily converted into a gag. “A man tied to a horse” is. Popular culture selects the repeatable image and discards the rest. That selection may be historically unfair, but it is culturally efficient.

This efficiency explains why the wild-horse image became more durable than Mazepa’s actual politics in Western popular consciousness. The horse image could be retold in a sentence. It could be drawn in one panel. It could be staged in one tableau. It could be parodied by substituting a donkey. It could be remembered by a young artist searching for a name. Political autonomy and imperial centralization require exposition. A donkey gag does not.

The old comic-strip source also makes Tulsa’s Dr. Mazeppa less arbitrary. The character’s name was not merely random nonsense, even if its later use became absurd. It had a buried visual logic: someone tied to an animal, punished or mocked, made into spectacle. Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi does not reenact that scene, but he inherits the carnival energy of a name long associated with staged humiliation and comic exaggeration. The horse is gone, but the theatricality remains.

This genealogy reveals a broader pattern in American culture. Names from European history often arrived through indirect popular channels rather than formal education. They came through cartoons, vaudeville, advertising, pulp fiction, horror films, ethnic jokes, stage

melodrama, and schoolbook fragments. By the time they entered American local performance, they were often detached from context but rich in atmosphere. Mazeppa Pompazoidi belongs to that world of repurposed fragments.

The 1902 comic-strip origin therefore becomes a small but powerful case study in cultural transmission. It shows how a name can survive by becoming ridiculous. It shows how myth can enter children's humor. It shows how a performer can rescue a forgotten fragment from an old page and turn it into a living persona. It also shows how easily historical meaning can be lost and later recovered. The road from Mazepa to Mazeppa to Tulsa runs through exactly such accidents.

4.3 Pompazoidi as pure invention

If "Mazeppa" carries inherited cultural residue, "Pompazoidi" appears to operate as comic invention. The invented surname completes the transformation. It prevents the character from being merely a version of the older Mazeppa and turns him into something unmistakably Sartain's own. "Dr. Mazeppa" might have sounded like a parody of a European legend or occult scholar. "Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi" becomes a fully absurd persona.

The sound of Pompazoidi is essential. It feels mock-learned, mock-foreign, and mock-grand. It suggests pomposity, pseudo-classicism, carnival exoticism, and nonsense at once. The syllables swell and tumble. The name seems to promise authority while undermining it. It is difficult to say solemnly, and that is the point. It creates comedy before the character speaks.

Invented names often work by imitating the structure of real names without belonging to any specific language. Pompazoidi sounds as though it might come from somewhere, but that somewhere is imaginary. It has the flavor of an old-world surname filtered through American comic exaggeration. This ambiguity gives it flexibility. It can suggest a professor, magician, fake aristocrat, mad doctor, charlatan, or traveling showman without committing to any one identity.

The combination with Mazeppa produces a layered effect. Mazeppa is inherited; Pompazoidi is invented. Mazeppa carries a real but obscured past; Pompazoidi announces theatrical fabrication. Together they create a name that is half fossil and half firework. This is why the full name is more memorable than either part alone. It joins historical echo to phonetic clowning.

The title "Dr." adds a third layer. The full construction has three components: institutional authority, mythic residue, and invented absurdity. "Dr." says credential. "Mazeppa" says exotic past. "Pompazoidi" says comic inflation. The character emerges from the collision of these signals. He is authorized and unauthorized, ancient and fake, grand and ridiculous. This instability is the engine of the persona.

Pompazoidi also prevents the audience from taking the Mazeppa reference too seriously. If Sartain had simply called the character Dr. Mazeppa, viewers might have wondered whether the figure had a direct literary or historical basis. Pompazoidi breaks that expectation. It declares that the performance belongs to parody and invention. The historical name is pulled into a new comic orbit and made subordinate to the invented persona.

This is an important moment in the name's mutation. The old Mazeppa is no longer the main subject. He becomes raw material. Pompazoidi absorbs him. The character is not a retelling of the horse legend; he is a host, a voice, a presence, a local television phenomenon. The inherited name gives texture, but the invented surname gives ownership. Sartain does not merely borrow a myth; he remakes it into a new comic organism.

The invented surname also participates in a long tradition of comic foreignness in American entertainment. Vaudeville, radio, television, and cartoons often used exaggerated names to suggest eccentric scholars, magicians, villains, inventors, or mystics. Such names could be affectionate, satirical, careless, or ethnically stereotyped depending on context. Pompazoidi belongs to the nonsense end of this tradition. It is not primarily a claim about a real ethnicity. It is a sound machine for absurd authority.

The danger in such invented foreignness is that it can collapse many cultures into a generalized "weird Europe." But in Dr. Mazeppa's case, the absurdity is so overt that the name functions less as representation than as anti-representation. It does not ask to be believed. It performs its falseness. The viewer knows this is not a real doctor from a real country. The pleasure lies in the exaggerated costume of authority.

Pompazoidi may also be heard as a parody of pomp. The beginning of the name suggests swelling importance, ceremony, and inflated self-presentation. This suits the character's mock-master-of-ceremonies role. A horror host must be pompous enough to command attention and ridiculous enough to be laughed at. The name gives him ceremonial absurdity. He presides over low-budget weirdness as though it were grand ritual.

The pure invention of Pompazoidi reveals a key difference between historical memory and comic creation. Historical memory is burdened by responsibility to what happened. Comic creation is responsible to effect. It asks what sound, image, rhythm, and persona will work. Sartain's invention works because it releases Mazeppa from historical seriousness without entirely losing its resonance. The comic surname is a valve that lets the pressure of old grandeur escape as laughter.

This also shows how American comedy digests European material. It often adds a layer of nonsense to make inherited culture usable. A name that might otherwise feel too heavy, foreign, or literary is domesticated through exaggeration. Pompazoidi domesticates Mazeppa by

making it safe for local laughter. The audience does not need to fear that it is missing a scholarly reference. The nonsense gives permission to enjoy the sound.

At the same time, the invented surname heightens the uncanny. Pure nonsense can be more memorable than realism because it resists easy placement. Pompazoidi lingers because it is neither familiar nor meaningful. It acts like a spell. It belongs to the same family as fake incantations, carnival names, and mock-Latin formulas. In a horror-host context, this spell-like quality is useful. The character's name becomes part of the ritual of the show.

The movement from Mazepa to Mazeppa to Pompazoidi thus marks increasing freedom from historical constraint. Mazepa is a real political figure. Mazeppa is the Western mythic transformation. Pompazoidi is the comic invention that completes the American mutation. Each step adds distance from the original, but each also creates a new kind of life. The historical man becomes name, image, spectacle, gag, and persona.

Yet the process is not pure forgetting. It is creative forgetting. The old name is not erased; it is placed inside a new structure. "Mazeppa" remains audible within "Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi," just as the older horse legend remains faintly audible within the comic-strip gag. The invention does not destroy the inheritance. It masks it, exaggerates it, and sends it into a new medium.

This makes Pompazoidi more than a joke surname. It is the sign of Americanization. The old-world fragment is no longer merely imported; it has been remixed. It belongs now to Tulsa, to local television, to a performer's imagination, and to the memory of viewers. The Cossack hetman has not become American, but the name's afterlife has. Pompazoidi is the stamp of that transformation.

4.4 Tulsa sacred absurdity

Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi's world was comic, but it was not without ritual. Local television horror hosting often creates a kind of playful sacred space. Viewers gather at a regular time. A host appears in costume. Strange films are introduced like texts from another realm. The audience expects repetition, familiar gestures, catchphrases, interruptions, and comic commentary. The experience is not religious, but it borrows from ritual form. It is a ceremony of absurdity.

The phrase "camp meeting" intensifies this connection. A camp meeting evokes revival, preaching, gathering, music, performance, exhortation, and emotional release. When joined to an "uncanny film festival," the phrase becomes comic blasphemy and affectionate parody at once. Horror films and revival meetings are both collective experiences of heightened feeling. One traffics in fear and the grotesque; the other in conviction and salvation. Dr. Mazeppa stands at their intersection as a mock preacher of the uncanny.

This is where Tulsa's Mazeppa becomes especially interesting for a paper that later returns to the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra. The Lavra controversy involves sacred memory in the formal sense: monastery, church, patronage, anathema, Orthodoxy, and national restoration. Tulsa's Mazeppa involves sacred form in comic disguise: ritual broadcast, mock authority, communal viewing, revival parody, and local devotion to a persona. The two are not equivalent, but they show how names can move between sacred seriousness and comic ritual.

The horror host is a kind of anti-cleric. He presides, interprets, and mediates, but his scriptures are monster movies. He welcomes the audience into a world of ghosts, mad scientists, vampires, aliens, and absurd dangers. He may mock the films, but he also gives them a frame. Without the host, a bad horror movie may simply be bad. With the host, it becomes part of a shared comic event. The host redeems badness by making it communal.

Dr. Mazeppa's name contributes to this mock-sacred authority. He sounds like someone who might possess forbidden knowledge, even though the performance undercuts that claim. The title "Doctor" suggests learning. Mazeppa suggests old-world mystery. Pompazoidi suggests comic priestcraft. The total effect is a figure who can preside over nonsense as though nonsense were a discipline. This is a familiar structure in comedy: false seriousness creates the conditions for laughter.

Tulsa sacred absurdity also belongs to the culture of American regional weirdness. Before the internet flattened local eccentricities into instantly shareable content, regional television allowed strange characters to become deeply embedded in particular places. The memory of such figures is often more intense than their production values would predict. People remember not because the shows were perfect, but because they were local rituals. They were part of growing up, staying up late, sharing jokes, and feeling that one's city had its own mythology.

Dr. Mazeppa became part of Tulsa's mythology in this sense. He was not a monument in stone but a monument in remembered performance. Local memory can preserve television figures with a warmth that resembles folk tradition. Stories are retold. Clips are sought. Names are repeated. Viewers who were present become witnesses. Later generations inherit the legend indirectly. The character becomes a civic ghost.

This civic ghostliness parallels, at a comic level, the afterlife of historical figures in national memory. A nation remembers through monuments, textbooks, church commemorations, anniversaries, and political speeches. A city remembers through broadcast personalities, local jokes, vanished buildings, weather events, school traditions, and shared media. Both forms of memory select, exaggerate, and ritualize. Both can turn persons into symbols. Dr. Mazeppa is a local symbol, just as Ivan Mazepa is a national and imperial symbol.

The absurdity is sacred not because it worships, but because it gathers affection around a repeated form. People protect beloved nonsense because it carries their past. A ridiculous name can become emotionally serious when it is tied to childhood, place, friendship, or local identity. This is one reason the Tulsa connection should not be treated as a mere curiosity. It shows how memory does not need solemnity to endure. Sometimes laughter preserves more faithfully than official reverence.

There is also a deeper resonance between the Mazeppa myth and horror-host culture. The original wild-horse legend involved exposure, danger, bodily vulnerability, and survival at the edge of death. Horror films repeatedly stage similar themes in cheaper and more fantastic forms. Bodies are threatened. The familiar becomes strange. The viewer experiences fear safely. The host mediates the ordeal. In this sense, Dr. Mazeppa presides over miniaturized ordeals, just as the legendary Mazeppa endured a mythic one.

The comic host also transforms fear into control. Horror without comedy may overwhelm. Comedy allows the audience to approach the frightening image and master it through laughter. This is another way the Mazeppa name has functioned across time. The terrifying punishment of the horse legend became a theatrical spectacle. The spectacle became parody. Parody became Tulsa entertainment. Each stage converts danger into a form that can be watched, repeated, and enjoyed.

Tulsa sacred absurdity therefore belongs to the broader human habit of ritualizing danger. Religious ritual, theater, carnival, horror, and comedy all allow communities to handle fear, guilt, death, transgression, and disorder. They do so by giving these forces form. Dr. Mazeppa's form was absurd, but form itself matters. The host appears, the show begins, the strange film is contained, the audience laughs, and the uncanny becomes bearable.

This helps explain why the name Mazeppa was suitable even without conscious historical intent. The name already carried theatrical danger from the older legend. It had been associated with punishment, motion, spectacle, and exotic atmosphere. A horror host needed precisely such energies, but in comic form. Sartain's character could draw upon the sound of danger while converting it into play. The name was old enough to feel mysterious and silly enough to be domesticated.

The contrast with the modern Lavra controversy is striking. In Kyiv, Mazepa's name is made solemn again. It is cast in bronze, placed within sacred-national memory, and defended as historical restoration. In Tulsa, Mazeppa's name was made playful, improvised, and carnivalesque. Yet both uses depend on the same underlying fact: the name is performative. It does something when spoken. It calls a world into being. In Kyiv, that world is one of patronage,

statehood, Orthodoxy, and anti-imperial correction. In Tulsa, it is one of late-night comedy, local memory, horror films, and absurd ceremony.

This double life is not a contradiction but the paper's central insight. Cultural signs do not remain in the register where they began. They migrate between sacred and comic, elite and popular, national and local, historical and invented. A name that once marked a Cossack hetman can become a joke doctor. A joke doctor can later help an American reader recognize the odd familiarity of a Ukrainian controversy. The comic afterlife does not cancel the sacred-political one. It reveals the name's range.

Tulsa's Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi also teaches humility about cultural knowledge. Many people encounter history first through distortion. A cartoon, joke, movie, song, or local character may preserve the entrance to a deeper story. The distortion may be inaccurate, but it can still become the doorway. The task is not to despise the doorway, but to walk through it carefully. From Pompazoidi one can move backward to Mazeppa, from Mazeppa to Mazepa, from Mazepa to the Hetmanate, and from the Hetmanate to the unresolved struggle over Ukraine's place in history.

The sacred absurdity of Tulsa therefore becomes part of the same long transmission that leads back to Kyiv. Dr. Mazeppa is funny because the name had already been made theatrical. He is memorable because the name retained old resonance. He is relevant because modern events have reactivated the historical root. The laugh and the curse are connected by the journey of a name. In Tulsa, Mazeppa made people laugh. In Kyiv and Moscow, Mazepa still makes people argue, pray, denounce, and commemorate. The distance between those responses is vast, but the name has traveled it.

5. Mazepa at the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra

The return of Mazepa to the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra is not a simple act of commemoration. It is a symbolic intervention inside one of the most charged sacred spaces in Eastern Christianity. The Lavra is not merely an architectural complex, a tourist site, or a national monument. It is a spiritual landscape layered with monastic sanctity, Kyivan antiquity, Orthodox legitimacy, imperial appropriation, Soviet rupture, post-Soviet contestation, and wartime sovereignty. To place Mazepa there is therefore to make a claim about history, church memory, and the future of Ukraine.

The controversy arises because Mazepa is not just any historical figure. He is one of the most contested names in the shared and divided memory of Ukraine and Russia. To Ukrainian national memory, he can be honored as a hetman, builder, patron, and early defender of political autonomy against imperial absorption. To Russian imperial and Orthodox-imperial

memory, he remains a traitor who broke faith with Peter the Great, allied with Sweden, and was condemned by ecclesiastical authority. These are not merely different opinions. They are rival civilizational maps. Each places Kyiv, Moscow, Orthodoxy, and political loyalty in a different order.

The Lavra intensifies the issue because Mazepa's relationship to it was real. He was not an alien figure imposed upon the site by modern politics alone. He was a major patron of Orthodox religious and architectural life, and his association with the Lavra belongs to the material history of the place. This fact complicates any rhetoric that treats his commemoration there as pure desecration. A man who helped build, fund, or adorn sacred institutions cannot be dismissed as simply external to them. His memory may be disputed, but his presence in the historical fabric is not arbitrary.

At the same time, the Lavra is not simply a museum of patronage. It is a living symbol within the current war. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the status of religious institutions associated with Moscow has become inseparable from questions of security, sovereignty, propaganda, and cultural decolonization. Ukrainian authorities and society have increasingly questioned whether church structures historically tied to Moscow can remain neutral when Moscow uses religious language to justify or sanctify war. In that atmosphere, Mazepa's return to the Lavra is not only antiquarian correction. It is part of a broader reordering of sacred memory away from imperial dependence.

This is why the reaction from Russian-aligned voices is so severe. To them, honoring Mazepa at the Lavra does not look like historical restoration. It looks like a deliberate insult to the Russian Orthodox civilizational narrative. In that narrative, Kyiv is the baptismal source of Holy Rus', Moscow is its guardian and heir, and figures who broke from Moscow's sovereign order are enemies of unity. Mazepa's presence in the Lavra disrupts that story. It says that Kyiv's sacred history can honor a man whom Moscow cursed. It says the sacred past is not owned by the imperial center.

The symbolic force of the act lies in this reversal. For centuries, the imperial narrative sought to hold together political obedience, church legitimacy, and historical truth. Mazepa's anathema represented that fusion. He was not merely defeated; he was marked as spiritually disgraced. Returning his image to the Lavra challenges the permanence of that mark. It suggests that the curse itself belonged to the politics of empire, not to eternal truth. That is why a bust can feel more dangerous than a military statement. It revises the moral architecture of memory.

The physical scale of the object matters less than its location. A bust, plaque, or memorial marker may be modest in size, but symbolic geography magnifies it. In an ordinary civic park, Mazepa would be one historical figure among many. At the Lavra, he enters a sacred argument.

The site supplies the force. The monument says not only “remember Mazepa,” but “remember him here.” The here is the message. The here connects patronage, sanctity, national recovery, and the rejection of imperial condemnation.

This section therefore treats Mazepa at the Lavra as a point where the paper’s strands converge. The historical Mazepa returns to a place connected with his patronage. The imperial traitor narrative resurfaces in outrage. The Orthodox question becomes unavoidable. The modern Ukrainian state asserts the right to reinterpret sacred-national inheritance. The Russian-aligned propaganda system responds by reviving the adulterer, traitor, and anathema motifs. The name that wandered through Romantic myth and Tulsa comedy becomes solemn again, placed back inside the deepest quarrel from which it first emerged: whether Kyiv belongs to its own history or to an imperial story told from elsewhere.

5.1 Why the Lavra matters

The Kyiv Pechersk Lavra matters because it is one of the great symbolic centers of Eastern Christian history. Its importance cannot be reduced to ownership, jurisdiction, or architecture alone. It is a place where sanctity, antiquity, monastic continuity, political authority, and national identity overlap. For centuries, the Lavra has functioned not merely as a monastery, but as a sign of spiritual inheritance. Whoever claims the Lavra claims proximity to the origins of Christian civilization in the region.

This is why disputes over the Lavra are never only local. The monastery stands within Kyiv, but its meaning radiates outward. It is tied to the memory of Kyivan Rus’, the Christianization of the region, the prestige of monasticism, the authority of saints, the production of religious texts, and the long struggle over whether the Kyivan inheritance belongs primarily to Ukraine, to Russia, to a broader Orthodox world, or to some contested combination of all three. The Lavra is a sacred archive in stone.

Modern politics did not create this symbolic density, but modern politics has made it newly visible. The war between Russia and Ukraine has sharpened every question of inheritance. Names, churches, saints, liturgical jurisdictions, language, monuments, and historical anniversaries have become part of the struggle. The Lavra stands at the center of this struggle because it is a place where Moscow’s religious-cultural claims and Ukraine’s sovereign self-definition directly confront one another.

For Russian Orthodox-imperial memory, Kyiv is often treated as the cradle of a larger spiritual civilization whose rightful continuity is guarded by Moscow. Within that view, the Lavra becomes not simply Ukrainian patrimony, but a sacred possession of a transhistorical Russian Orthodox world. This framing makes Ukrainian state action at the Lavra appear suspicious by

definition. Any removal of Moscow influence or restoration of Ukrainian-centered memory can be portrayed as schism, secular intrusion, nationalism, or desecration.

For Ukrainian memory, the Lavra's location in Kyiv is not incidental. It is a reminder that the sacred history later claimed by Moscow has older roots in the Kyivan world. Ukrainian recovery of the Lavra is therefore not an act of theft from Orthodoxy, but an act of reclaiming a sacred inheritance that imperial narratives absorbed and renamed. This is why commemorating Mazepa there matters. He represents an early modern Ukrainian Orthodox patron whose memory was suppressed or cursed precisely because he broke from Moscow's political order.

The Lavra also matters because sacred spaces teach history differently from books. A textbook can explain that Mazepa was a patron. A bust at the Lavra makes that claim visible. It invites pilgrims, visitors, monks, officials, and citizens to encounter Mazepa not only as a controversial name, but as part of the site's memory. Visual placement changes public consciousness. It moves a figure from footnote to presence.

Sacred spaces are especially powerful because they naturalize memory. A monument in a holy place suggests that the honored figure belongs within the moral universe of the site. This is what Russian-aligned critics resist. They do not merely object to Mazepa being remembered. They object to him being remembered inside a sacred space that they believe should confirm the old imperial verdict. To them, the Lavra should preserve Mazepa's exclusion. To Ukraine, his return can signify the healing of a historical wound.

The Lavra's importance is also architectural. Sacred buildings are not neutral containers of worship. They are the products of patrons, craftsmen, rulers, monks, donors, wars, fires, reconstructions, and political transitions. Every wall has a history of power behind it. When Mazepa is remembered as a patron, the Lavra becomes evidence against his erasure. The very stones complicate the curse. A condemned man helped build what the condemning tradition later claimed as holy inheritance.

This material contradiction is one reason the Lavra is so explosive. If sacred architecture still bears the imprint of a man anathematized by the imperial church, then the relationship between sanctity and political condemnation becomes unstable. Was Mazepa truly outside Orthodoxy, or was his condemnation a political act by a church order aligned with the victorious tsar? The Lavra forces the question because it preserves his contribution in material form.

The site also matters because it links past and present sovereignty. Control over sacred heritage often becomes a measure of political independence. A state that cannot interpret its own sacred places remains trapped in another power's historical grammar. By restoring Mazepa's memory at the Lavra, Ukraine asserts that it has the right to name its own patrons, judge its own past, and distinguish Orthodox history from Russian imperial possession.

This does not mean every Ukrainian act of memory is beyond critique. Commemoration always simplifies. It selects. It turns complex figures into symbols. Mazepa was not a modern democrat, and his politics belonged to an elite early modern world. Yet the fact of simplification does not invalidate commemoration. All monuments simplify. The question is what historical wound or claim the simplification addresses. In this case, the claim is that Mazepa's imperial condemnation should no longer monopolize his meaning.

The Lavra also matters because it gives the Mazepa controversy a spiritual audience. A monument in a secular square speaks to citizens. A memorial in or near a sacred complex speaks also to believers, pilgrims, clergy, and those who see history through providential categories. The reaction against Mazepa therefore takes on theological intensity. Critics speak not only of bad politics, but of sacrilege. Supporters speak not only of nationalism, but of justice and restoration.

This is why the phrase "inside the holy Lavra" carries so much rhetorical charge. It suggests violation, intrusion, and impurity. Whether the object is a bust, marker, or proposed monument, the polemical imagination transforms it into an act of desecration. The phrase makes location do the work of accusation. It asks the reader to feel that an unclean political figure has been brought into sacred space by an illegitimate regime.

A careful analysis must resist that emotional shortcut. The Lavra is holy, but holiness does not settle the historical question. If Mazepa was a patron of the Lavra, then remembering him there is not self-evidently desecration. It may be controversial, political, and provocative, but it is not arbitrary. The outrage depends on accepting the imperial verdict on Mazepa before examining the evidence of his patronage.

The Lavra therefore functions as a test case for post-imperial memory. Can a sacred site historically entangled with empire be reinterpreted by the nation in which it stands? Can a figure cursed by a politically aligned church authority be restored as a patron? Can Orthodoxy in Ukraine remember itself without submitting to Moscow's categories of loyalty and treason? These questions make the Lavra far more than a backdrop. It is the stage on which the meaning of Mazepa is being retried.

5.2 Mazepa as Lavra patron

Mazepa's connection to the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra is essential because it transforms the controversy from symbolic provocation into historical argument. If Mazepa had no meaningful relationship to the Lavra, his commemoration there would be easier to dismiss as an ideological gesture imposed from outside. But his patronage gives the act a historical foundation. He belongs to the Lavra's past not as an invading symbol, but as a donor, builder, and supporter of Orthodox sacred culture.

Patronage in Mazepa's world was not peripheral to politics. It was one of the central ways authority made itself visible and legitimate. A ruler or elite patron who funded churches, monasteries, schools, printing, icons, walls, and liturgical objects was not simply giving private charity. He was making a statement about order. He was identifying himself with the protection of the faith, the cultivation of learning, and the continuity of a sacred community. In this sense, Mazepa's patronage was part of his statecraft.

The Lavra was among the most important possible recipients of such patronage. It was not a minor local church. It was a major monastic and spiritual center with deep historical prestige. To support the Lavra was to associate oneself with the oldest and most authoritative layers of Kyivan Christianity. For a Cossack hetman seeking legitimacy in a contested political landscape, such patronage affirmed that his authority was rooted not only in military office, but in Orthodox civilization.

This complicates the later imperial accusation that Mazepa was an enemy of Orthodoxy. A man can be politically condemned by an ecclesiastical authority and still have been a major benefactor of Orthodox life. Indeed, that contradiction is precisely the point. The anathema sought to define Mazepa's spiritual memory after his break with Peter. His patronage preserves evidence of his earlier and deeper relationship to the church. The curse and the walls speak against each other.

The existence of Mazepa's patronage also challenges the idea that Russian imperial memory is identical with Orthodox memory. If Orthodoxy is reduced to loyalty to Moscow and its sovereign order, then Mazepa must remain cursed. But if Orthodoxy is understood more broadly as a sacred tradition with multiple historical centers and patrons, then Mazepa can be seen as one of the builders of Ukrainian Orthodox culture. The Lavra makes this distinction unavoidable.

Mazepa's support for church construction and renovation belonged to a broader cultural flowering associated with the Cossack elite. This world valued learning, printing, liturgical beauty, architecture, and the strengthening of Orthodox institutions. Such activity was not anti-Christian, anti-Orthodox, or anti-monastic. It was the opposite. It invested wealth and authority into the visible and institutional life of the church. That is why the imperial caricature requires selective memory. It must remember the defection and forget the patron.

The phrase "Mazepa as Lavra patron" therefore carries polemical force of its own. It answers the accusation of desecration by pointing to the sacred site's own history. It says that Mazepa is not being smuggled into the Lavra from modern nationalism alone. He is being restored to a place that bears traces of his generosity. This does not force everyone to admire him, but it does make blanket denunciation historically inadequate.

There is also a moral irony in the controversy. The Russian-aligned critic may claim to defend the Lavra from Mazepa, while the historical record suggests that Mazepa helped defend, enrich, or beautify the Lavra. The modern denunciation therefore depends on a separation between the sacred object and one of its patrons. It seeks to enjoy the inheritance while rejecting the donor. This is possible only if the donor's political sin is treated as retroactively nullifying all his religious contributions.

But sacred history rarely works so cleanly. Churches and monasteries are often built by complicated patrons. Kings, princes, nobles, merchants, soldiers, and rulers who funded sacred institutions were not sinless. Many were violent, ambitious, morally compromised, or politically controversial. Sacred architecture is full of such paradoxes. If only morally uncontested patrons could be remembered, much of Christian architectural history would become unintelligible. The question is not whether Mazepa was flawless, but whether his real patronage can be honestly acknowledged.

Acknowledging Mazepa as a Lavra patron also restores Ukrainian agency within Orthodox history. It shows that Ukrainian elites were not merely passive recipients of a religious civilization administered from Moscow. They built, funded, governed, printed, and imagined. They shaped the sacred landscape. Mazepa's patronage is therefore part of a larger argument about Ukrainian historical subjecthood. The Lavra was not simply inherited by Ukraine; it was also made, in part, by Ukrainian patrons.

The architectural dimension of patronage is particularly powerful because buildings outlast political regimes. A donor may be cursed, a name may be suppressed, and a state may fall, but stone remains. Later generations may forget who paid for a wall or church, but the material consequence of patronage continues to structure sacred experience. Restoring Mazepa's name reconnects visible sacred space to the human and political history behind it.

This restoration can be experienced as liberation or provocation depending on the viewer's memory system. For Ukrainians committed to decolonizing historical memory, naming Mazepa at the Lavra can feel like correcting a forced silence. For Russian imperial loyalists, the same act feels like an assault on the inherited hierarchy of saints, traitors, and sacred legitimacy. The disagreement is not about whether names matter. Both sides know they matter. The disagreement is over who has the authority to name.

Mazepa's patronage also challenges the simplistic opposition between nationalism and religion. Critics may portray his commemoration as secular nationalist intrusion into holy space. But if Mazepa was a religious patron, then national recovery and sacred memory are not easily separated. Ukraine is not merely inserting a modern political hero into a church setting. It is

recovering a historical figure whose politics and Orthodoxy were intertwined in early modern forms. The categories of secular nationalism and pure religion do not map neatly onto his world.

This is important because modern polemic often anachronistically weaponizes religious language. It assumes that loyalty to Moscow equals Orthodoxy, and resistance to Moscow equals anti-Orthodox nationalism. Mazepa's patronage breaks that equation. He was both Orthodox patron and anti-Petrine rebel. The combination is intolerable to imperial memory because it proves that opposition to Moscow need not mean opposition to Orthodoxy.

The Lavra patronage therefore makes Mazepa dangerous in a way that a purely secular nationalist figure would not be. A secular nationalist can be dismissed by Russian Orthodox polemic as outside the church. Mazepa cannot be dismissed so easily because he stands inside the history of church building. He demonstrates that Ukrainian political autonomy and Orthodox patronage have coexisted. This is why his bust at the Lavra is symbolically potent. It is not only national. It is ecclesiastical-historical.

The restored memory of Mazepa as patron also invites a broader reconsideration of anathema. If his condemnation was tied to political rebellion against Peter, then modern recognition of his patronage asks whether that condemnation should continue to govern public memory. The bust does not need to settle theological debates in order to shift historical consciousness. It simply makes visible the part of Mazepa that the curse obscured.

Ultimately, Mazepa's Lavra patronage turns the controversy from scandal into reckoning. The question is no longer whether a cursed traitor has been placed in a holy site. The question is whether a holy site is finally acknowledging a patron whom imperial victory turned into a curse. That is a very different question, and it is the question Russian-aligned rhetoric works hard to avoid.

5.3 Zelensky's restoration narrative

The public framing of Mazepa's return to the Lavra by President Volodymyr Zelensky belongs to a broader project of historical restoration. In this narrative, Ukraine is not inventing a new past but correcting an imposed distortion. Mazepa is presented as a great Ukrainian, a patron, and a figure whose reputation was damaged by imperial power because he resisted subordination. The bust or memorial marker therefore becomes an act of repair. It does not simply honor a man; it challenges the verdict placed upon him by the victorious empire.

The phrase "historical injustice" is central to this restoration narrative. It implies that the problem is not merely neglect, but wrong judgment. Mazepa was not simply forgotten. He was condemned, distorted, and excluded from the sacred-national memory to which his deeds entitled him. Restoration therefore requires more than adding his name to a list. It requires

placing him where the distortion is most visible and consequential. The Lavra serves that purpose because it contains the contradiction between his patronage and his condemnation.

Zelensky's framing also places Mazepa within a lineage of Ukrainian statehood. This is significant because Mazepa's world was not modern Ukraine in the contemporary sense. He did not speak the language of twenty-first-century sovereignty, democracy, or national self-determination. Yet modern nations often build memory through earlier forms of political agency. The Cossack Hetmanate becomes one such ancestor. Mazepa becomes a symbol of the long struggle to prevent Ukrainian political life from being absorbed by Moscow.

This kind of restoration necessarily involves translation across time. Early modern autonomy is translated into modern sovereignty. Hetmanate rights are translated into national independence. Orthodox patronage is translated into cultural state-building. The translation is not exact, but it is meaningful. Nations remember through continuities of conflict, not through perfect ideological sameness. Mazepa matters because the structure of the conflict remains recognizable: Ukraine's political and sacred inheritance versus imperial centralization from Moscow.

The restoration narrative also responds to the moral vocabulary of treason. If Russian imperial memory says Mazepa betrayed Peter, Ukrainian restoration asks whether Peter's empire had the moral right to command absolute loyalty. If the tsar's project threatened the autonomy of the Hetmanate, then Mazepa's break can be reframed as loyalty to a different and deeper political community. Restoration therefore changes the moral subject of loyalty. The question becomes not "Did Mazepa betray the tsar?" but "What was Mazepa trying to save?"

This reframing is especially powerful during wartime. Since Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukrainian public memory has been reorganized around resistance to imperial domination. Figures once treated ambiguously can be reinterpreted through the lens of anti-imperial continuity. Mazepa becomes newly legible because the present war appears to confirm the danger he perceived: that Moscow's claim to unity can become a program of subordination. The past is read through the present, and the present is given depth through the past.

This does not mean the restoration narrative is neutral. No state commemoration is neutral. It selects a usable past. It elevates certain figures and suppresses ambiguities. It turns complex historical actors into public symbols. Zelensky's Mazepa is necessarily simplified: patron, Ukrainian, state-builder, victim of imperial injustice. The simplification is real, but it should be compared with the simplification it opposes: adulterer, traitor, cursed enemy of Orthodoxy. The question is not whether commemoration simplifies, but which simplification better restores historical proportion.

The Lavra setting strengthens Zelensky's claim because it allows the restoration narrative to use place as evidence. If Mazepa helped shape the Lavra, then honoring him there is not merely symbolic nationalism. It is a site-specific correction. The place remembers him even when inherited polemic refuses to do so. The bust says that memory should follow the evidence of patronage rather than the politics of anathema.

Zelensky's narrative also participates in the broader Ukrainian effort to separate Orthodoxy from Russian imperial control. This is delicate territory because faith cannot be reduced to state policy. Many believers have complex attachments to liturgy, language, clergy, monastery, and tradition. Yet the war has made it impossible to ignore how religious institutions and narratives can be used in geopolitical struggle. Restoring Mazepa at the Lavra signals that Ukrainian Orthodoxy and Ukrainian sacred memory need not be mediated by Moscow's judgments.

The restoration narrative also challenges the inherited geography of reverence. Russian imperial memory often places Moscow as the later guardian and interpreter of the Kyivan inheritance. Ukrainian restoration reverses the gaze. Kyiv is not a peripheral site whose meaning is determined by Moscow. Kyiv is the source, and its sacred spaces can judge imperial narratives rather than merely receive them. Mazepa's return to the Lavra embodies this reversal. The center of interpretation moves back to Kyiv.

There is also a personal political dimension. Zelensky, as wartime president, uses historical commemoration to strengthen national morale and symbolic unity. Honoring Mazepa at the Lavra links the current struggle to a longer genealogy of resistance. It tells Ukrainians that their war is not an isolated emergency but part of an old pattern in which Ukrainian autonomy is defended against imperial denial. Such narratives can inspire endurance. They also simplify conflict into moral continuity, which is both their strength and their risk.

The risk is that restoration may harden into counter-myth. A recovered Mazepa can become too polished, too prophetic, too neatly aligned with modern needs. Serious historical writing must resist both imperial demonization and nationalist flattening. Mazepa was a political actor with ambitions, class interests, tactical calculations, and limitations. The restoration narrative should open inquiry, not close it. Its value lies in breaking the monopoly of condemnation, not in replacing history with uncritical hero worship.

Nevertheless, the need for restoration is real. Imperial memory has long used defeat to define Mazepa. Because he lost, his enemies claimed the authority to name him. Because Peter won, Mazepa became traitor. Because the imperial church condemned him, he became cursed. Because later Russian narratives inherited that verdict, his patronage and political reasoning were marginalized. Restoration attempts to undo the injustice of allowing victory to masquerade as truth.

Zelensky's narrative also speaks to international audiences. Many outside Ukraine know Mazepa, if at all, through the Western Mazeppa legend or not at all. Presenting him as a Lavra patron and Ukrainian state-builder reorients foreign understanding. It invites outsiders to move beyond the horse myth and the Russian traitor narrative. It situates Mazepa within Ukrainian historical continuity rather than exotic spectacle or imperial condemnation.

This international dimension matters because modern wars are also wars of explanation. Ukraine must explain itself to allies, publics, media systems, and historical imaginations shaped by older Russian narratives. Commemorating Mazepa at a globally recognizable sacred site helps produce an image: Ukraine honors the patrons and defenders whom empire cursed. That image is politically useful, but it is also historically grounded enough to merit attention.

Zelensky's restoration narrative therefore functions on several levels at once. It is a national act of commemoration, a wartime morale statement, a challenge to Russian Orthodox-imperial memory, a site-specific acknowledgment of patronage, and a reclassification of Mazepa from traitor to state-builder. Its power comes from combining these layers. Its controversy comes from the same combination.

The deeper issue is authority over the past. Who has the right to say what Mazepa means? The empire that defeated and cursed him? The church structures that inherited that condemnation? The Ukrainian state that now claims him? The sacred site that bears traces of his patronage? The historians who reconstruct his world? The believers who experience the Lavra as holy? Zelensky's restoration narrative answers by giving priority to Ukrainian sovereignty and historical repair. Russian-aligned critics answer by invoking imperial loyalty and sacred curse. The conflict between those answers is the modern Mazepa controversy.

5.4 The difference between a bust and a monument

In disputes over memory, physical objects are often rhetorically enlarged. A bust becomes a statue. A marker becomes a monument. A proposal becomes an accomplished fact. A site-specific commemoration becomes a generalized provocation. These shifts may appear minor, but they matter because they shape public emotion. The controversy around Mazepa at the Lavra shows how easily different commemorative acts can be conflated into a single scandal.

A bust is not the same as a full public monument. A bust typically presents a head and shoulders, often as a memorial or commemorative marker. It invites recognition, not necessarily domination of space. A large monument in a central square makes a stronger civic claim. It can reorganize public space around the honored figure. If a Lavra bust and a proposed central Kyiv monument are collapsed into one story, the emotional scale changes. The audience imagines a more aggressive act than may actually have occurred.

This distinction does not make the bust insignificant. In a sacred site, even a small object can carry enormous meaning. But analytical precision matters. Propaganda often benefits from blurring scale and location. It can imply that a giant statue has been installed in the heart of a holy monastery when the actual object may be more modest, more specific, or differently situated. The goal is to maximize outrage, not clarify facts.

The phrase “installing a statue inside the holy Lavra” is rhetorically efficient because it produces a vivid picture. The reader sees an intrusive object, perhaps large, perhaps dominating, placed where it does not belong. The phrase does not encourage questions about exact form, placement, dedication, historical context, or patronage. It compresses the issue into desecration. That compression is the mark of polemic.

A bust or memorial marker operates differently from a statue in symbolic grammar. A bust often functions as acknowledgment. It says: this person belongs in the memory of this place. A statue, especially a full-body statue in a public square, may imply heroization, civic centrality, and broader political elevation. Both can be controversial, but they make different claims. Confusing them allows critics to attribute the strongest possible claim to the smaller object.

The distinction between Lavra commemoration and central Kyiv monument is also important. The Lavra argument rests heavily on patronage. Mazepa belongs there because of his relationship to the monastery and sacred architecture. A central Kyiv monument would rest on a broader national argument: Mazepa as Ukrainian statesman and symbol of autonomy. These arguments overlap, but they are not identical. One is site-specific; the other is civic-national. Polemic can obscure this difference by treating all Mazepa commemoration as one coordinated insult.

The location of a memorial also determines its audience. At the Lavra, the audience includes pilgrims, clergy, believers, historians, tourists, and citizens encountering sacred heritage. In a central square, the audience is the civic public. The same figure speaks differently depending on place. A Lavra bust says, “Remember Mazepa as patron of this sacred inheritance.” A central monument says, “Remember Mazepa as a national figure in the public life of the capital.” Both statements matter, but they are not interchangeable.

The difference also affects the accusation of desecration. If Mazepa is honored at the Lavra because he was a Lavra patron, the charge of desecration must overcome the fact of historical connection. If he is honored in a secular square, the argument shifts to public memory and national symbolism. By conflating the two, critics can transfer sacred outrage from the Lavra to every Mazepa commemoration, or transfer the scale of a public monument back into the Lavra. This creates a larger emotional target.

Careful language is therefore not pedantry. It is a defense against manipulation. Memory wars often turn on small factual distinctions. Was something proposed or completed? Was it a bust, plaque, sign, statue, or full monument? Was it inside a church, within a monastery complex, outside a building, or in a public square? Was it dedicated by church authorities, state officials, cultural institutions, or some combination? Each detail changes interpretation.

In the case of Mazepa, precision matters even more because the historical figure is already surrounded by legend. The wild-horse myth, the anathema, the traitor label, and the Lavra commemoration form a highly combustible symbolic mixture. When facts about the object are blurred, the old myths rush in to fill the gap. The reader no longer sees a memorial marker connected to patronage. He sees the adulterer-traitor forced into holy space by a hostile regime.

The bust-versus-monument distinction also reveals different forms of power. A large public monument asserts dominance through scale. A bust in a sacred-historical setting asserts legitimacy through placement. The Lavra bust does not need to be huge to be powerful. Its power comes from saying that Mazepa belongs in the site's memory. This may be more threatening to imperial memory than a larger statue elsewhere, because it undermines the curse at the point where sacred history is most concentrated.

The question of scale also intersects with the politics of replacement. When modern states propose monuments in places associated with removed imperial or Soviet figures, the act becomes part of symbolic succession. One historical order is displaced by another. A proposed Mazepa monument in central Kyiv would therefore speak to de-Sovietization, de-Russification, and the replacement of imperial memory with Ukrainian memory. A Lavra bust speaks instead to religious-historical restoration. Both are post-imperial acts, but they operate in different symbolic registers.

Conflation serves the polemical need to depict Ukraine's memory policy as a single campaign of sacrilege and betrayal. Every act becomes evidence of the same alleged anti-Orthodox, anti-Russian, anti-sacred agenda. The particular reasons for honoring Mazepa at the Lavra disappear. His patronage disappears. The difference between sacred restoration and civic monument disappears. What remains is the image of enemies installing a cursed traitor everywhere.

A scholarly treatment must resist this flattening. It should not deny that Ukrainian commemoration is political. It clearly is. But politics does not make all distinctions irrelevant. On the contrary, political interpretation requires more precision, not less. If memory is being reorganized, we need to know how, where, through which objects, and with what stated rationale. Only then can we judge the act accurately.

The bust-versus-monument distinction also helps protect the paper from becoming propaganda in reverse. It would be easy to answer Russian-aligned exaggeration with Ukrainian counter-exaggeration. But the stronger argument is more disciplined: Mazepa's commemoration at the Lavra is historically meaningful because of his patronage; its scale and form should be described accurately; its controversy arises from rival memory systems; and attempts to inflate or conflate the object reveal the mechanics of outrage.

This precision also clarifies the role of Zelensky. A head of state may support multiple forms of commemoration: a Lavra bust, a public monument, a national speech, an anniversary event, or educational reframing. Each act has a different audience and purpose. Treating them as a single provocation erases political strategy and reduces everything to insult. But state memory policy is often layered. It works through site-specific restorations, public monuments, school curricula, renamed streets, museum exhibitions, and speeches. Mazepa can function differently in each layer.

The Lavra bust is especially important because it reverses the old spiritual exclusion. A central monument might celebrate Mazepa as national hero, but the Lavra commemoration addresses the wound of sacred condemnation. It says that the man cursed as traitor was also a patron of holy space. That is a more subtle and perhaps more profound claim than ordinary heroization. It does not merely elevate him; it restores him to a place from which imperial memory sought to banish him.

The controversy therefore should be understood not as a simple dispute over statuary, but as a dispute over symbolic jurisdiction. Who controls the meaning of the object? Who controls the meaning of the place? Who controls the meaning of Mazepa's name? A bust can raise these questions as forcefully as a monument. But to answer them responsibly, one must begin by describing the object honestly.

The difference between a bust and a monument is thus part of the larger difference between history and propaganda. History slows down to distinguish. Propaganda speeds up to fuse. History asks what was placed where, by whom, and why. Propaganda asks what image will produce the strongest reaction. In the Mazepa controversy, the image of a cursed adulterer-traitor installed inside holy ground is designed for maximum emotional force. The more precise account is more complicated and, for that reason, more truthful.

In the end, the object's modest physical form does not reduce its symbolic importance. A bust at the Lavra can reopen three centuries of memory. It can challenge an imperial curse. It can assert Ukrainian sacred agency. It can provoke Telegram denunciation. It can force outsiders to ask why a Cossack hetman still matters. But its power should be understood through accuracy,

not inflation. The controversy is strong enough without exaggeration. Mazepa's name carries enough history on its own.

6. Aussie Cossack and the Telegram Memory War

The Telegram post about Mazepa at the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra should not be read merely as a historical claim. It should be read as a wartime text, a compact act of political theology, and a specimen of digital memory warfare. Its purpose is not to examine Mazepa with balance. Its purpose is to arrange inherited symbols into a moral weapon. In a few lines, the post joins adultery, treason, anathema, sacred desecration, Zelensky, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the desired military "liberation" of Kyiv. The result is not an argument in the ordinary academic sense. It is a denunciation, a curse, and a call to historical purification.

This does not mean the post is uninteresting. On the contrary, it is highly revealing. It shows how Mazepa still functions as an active symbolic object in the Russia-Ukraine war. A figure from the early eighteenth century is not dead in this discourse. He is present, usable, accusatory, and dangerous. His name can be invoked to explain the present war as a continuation of older betrayals. Zelensky's Ukraine becomes the heir of Mazepa's treason. Russia becomes the avenger of Orthodox continuity. The Lavra becomes the violated sanctuary. The Russian army becomes the instrument of restoration.

The post's power lies in compression. It does not pause to distinguish Mazepa the historical hetman from Mazeppa the wild-horse legend, or the anathema from the politics that produced it, or the Lavra's sacred history from Mazepa's patronage of it. Instead, it fuses all these layers into one emotionally forceful image. Mazepa is adulterer, traitor, oath-breaker, cursed man, and desecrating presence. Zelensky is dictator, provocateur, and enemy of Orthodoxy. The Russian army is implicitly not an invading force but a liberating and cleansing one. This fusion is the essence of propaganda: not necessarily the invention of every detail, but the arrangement of selected details into a total moral frame.

Aussie Cossack is useful to this paper precisely because the post demonstrates the durability of old imperial memory in new media. Telegram may be technologically modern, but the symbolic grammar is old. The language of betrayal, sacred insult, curse, and liberation belongs to a much older tradition of imperial religious rhetoric. What has changed is speed, distribution, and affective intensity. A polemic that might once have appeared in a pamphlet, sermon, or newspaper column now circulates instantly through a phone screen. The form is digital; the emotional structure is archaic.

The phrase "another shameful act" immediately places the reader inside a sequence of offenses. The post does not present the Mazepa commemoration as a single event to be

evaluated. It presents it as one more proof of an already established pattern. This is a common technique in polemical writing. The reader is told, before any evidence is considered, that the event belongs to a continuing moral descent. Outrage is preloaded. The new event confirms what the audience has already been taught to believe.

The naming of Zelensky as the “Kiev dictator” performs several acts at once. It delegitimizes the Ukrainian president, rejects the Ukrainian-centered spelling “Kyiv,” and frames Ukrainian sovereignty as illegitimate rule over historically Russian sacred space. The post therefore fights not only over Mazepa, but over names themselves: Kiev versus Kyiv, dictator versus president, traitor versus patron, liberation versus invasion. This is entirely appropriate to the paper’s larger argument. The war is fought not only with weapons, but with names.

The post also shows the importance of sacred geography. If Mazepa were being discussed in a purely secular context, the rhetoric might focus on treason, nationalism, or anti-Russian provocation. But because the Lavra is involved, the language becomes more intense. The issue becomes desecration. A historical commemoration is reinterpreted as an attack on holiness. Once that frame is accepted, military removal can be imagined as religiously justified. The sacred site turns political disagreement into spiritual emergency.

This section does not need to decide whether readers should admire or dislike Aussie Cossack as a personality. The more important point is analytical. The post is a clean example of how Telegram-era propaganda works by activating dormant historical materials. The wild-horse legend supplies sexual shame. The break with Peter supplies political treason. The anathema supplies spiritual condemnation. The Lavra supplies sacred outrage. Zelensky supplies the living enemy. The Russian army supplies the desired instrument of resolution. All pieces lock together.

What makes this especially powerful is that each element has some recognizable cultural source. Propaganda is often strongest when it does not feel entirely fabricated. Mazepa did break with Peter. He was anathematized in the Russian imperial church tradition. The wild-horse legend is famous, even if historically dubious. The Lavra is holy. Zelensky did participate in the modern commemoration. The post’s distortion lies not simply in making everything up, but in refusing context, suppressing counter-evidence, and arranging the material so that only one conclusion can be felt: Mazepa is filth, Zelensky is enemy, Russia must cleanse Kyiv.

Telegram intensifies this kind of rhetoric because it rewards immediacy and emotional certainty. A short post must strike quickly. It has little space for nuance and little incentive to include it. The most effective Telegram polemic is vivid, angry, memorable, and shareable. The Mazepa post succeeds by offering readers a miniature sacred drama. There is a villain, a desecrated sanctuary, a cursed historical symbol, a persecuted church, and a hoped-for army of liberation. The reader is not invited to deliberate. The reader is invited to align.

This is why Mazepa is still useful in 2026. He is not merely a figure from textbooks. He is a symbolic bridge between the Great Northern War and the current war. By invoking him, Russian-aligned rhetoric can present Ukraine's modern independence as part of a recurring pattern of betrayal. The historical gap of more than three centuries collapses. Mazepa and Zelensky become variations of the same type: the ungrateful Ukrainian leader who turns against rightful Russian authority. The repetition is the message.

Yet the post also reveals anxiety. If Mazepa were truly dead as a symbol, his bust would not provoke such outrage. The fury shows that the imperial verdict is not secure. A restored Mazepa threatens the narrative that his meaning was settled forever at Poltava and sealed by anathema. The Telegram denunciation is therefore defensive as well as aggressive. It tries to reassert an old curse at the very moment Ukraine is attempting to lift it.

6.1 Telegram as wartime pulpit

Telegram functions in the current war not merely as a messaging app, but as a pulpit, bulletin board, rumor mill, propaganda channel, devotional space, and battlefield amplifier. It allows political and religious language to circulate without the slower filters of traditional media. Its posts can feel intimate because they arrive directly on the user's device, but they can also reach mass audiences. This mixture of immediacy and scale makes Telegram especially suited to wartime moral framing.

A pulpit does more than convey information. It interprets events. It tells listeners what an event means, who is righteous, who is wicked, what must be feared, and what must be hoped for. The Telegram post about Mazepa performs exactly this function. It does not simply report that a bust or memorial has appeared at the Lavra. It tells the audience that the act is shameful, that Zelensky is a dictator, that Mazepa is a cursed adulterer-traitor, that the Russian Orthodox Church is being dishonored, and that the Russian army should remove the offenders. This is sermon structure in compressed digital form.

The post has a liturgical rhythm of accusation. First comes the exclamation, then the naming of sin, then the historical curse, then the sacred violation, then the prayer for deliverance. The structure resembles a miniature homily of outrage. The reader is led from disgust to judgment to petition. Even the final call to pray gives the post a devotional surface. It is not merely asking the reader to think something. It is asking the reader to participate spiritually in a desired political outcome.

Telegram's format encourages this compression. A long historical essay would have to slow down and explain Mazepa's biography, the Great Northern War, the Battle of Poltava, the politics of anathema, the Lavra's history, and the current church-state conflict in Ukraine. A Telegram post can instead mobilize keywords. "Dictator," "adulterer," "traitor," "anathema,"

“holy Lavra,” “liberate Kiev” are not neutral descriptors. They are triggers. Each summons a ready-made emotional world.

This is why Telegram channels often become communities of interpretation. Followers do not come only for facts. They come for a shared moral atmosphere. They come to see events placed into a familiar drama. If one already believes that Ukraine’s government is illegitimate, that Moscow is the defender of Orthodoxy, and that the war is a liberation struggle, the Mazepa post confirms and intensifies that worldview. It gives the reader the satisfaction of recognition. The new event fits the old pattern.

The platform also blurs the line between news and exhortation. A post may begin as a report, but it quickly becomes a call to judgment or action. In this case, the reported event becomes evidence of sacrilege, and sacrilege becomes justification for military liberation. This movement from fact-claim to sacred-political conclusion is fast. Telegram’s emotional economy rewards speed. The reader moves from “what happened?” to “what must be done?” almost instantly.

Calling Telegram a wartime pulpit does not mean every post is religious. It means the platform often performs a preacherly role in wartime: selecting texts, interpreting signs, naming enemies, reinforcing group identity, and converting anxiety into moral certainty. In secular channels, the sacred vocabulary may be replaced by national destiny, anti-fascism, anti-imperialism, security, or revenge. In explicitly Orthodox-imperial rhetoric, the sacred language remains direct. The Mazepa post belongs to this more openly religious-political form.

The pulpit analogy also helps explain why historical nuance is unwelcome in such posts. A sermon aimed at mobilization does not usually pause to present the opponent’s strongest case. It seeks conviction. Likewise, the Mazepa post does not mention his patronage of the Lavra because that fact would weaken the desired moral effect. It does not separate legend from history because the legend is too useful. It does not discuss Ukrainian readings of Mazepa because the purpose is to close interpretive space, not open it.

Digital wartime pulpits also depend on repetition. One post may not convert a reader, but repeated posts create a moral world. Zelensky is repeatedly named as illegitimate. Kyiv is repeatedly called Kiev. Ukrainian religious policy is repeatedly framed as persecution. Russian military action is repeatedly described as liberation. Over time, these repetitions become the background assumptions through which every new event is interpreted. The Mazepa post works because it fits within that repeated pattern.

The form also allows ordinary users to become participants in the sermon. They forward, comment, react, quote, and repost. The original message becomes a seed for secondary outrage. In older media, a sermon was heard by a congregation in a place. On Telegram, the

congregation is dispersed, interactive, and networked. The pulpit travels in the pocket. The faithful can become distributors.

This has consequences for memory. Historical figures like Mazepa can be revived rapidly when they serve the needs of the present. A follower who may have known little about him can receive a complete moral package in seconds. The package may be selective, but it is memorable. Mazepa equals adulterer, traitor, cursed enemy of Orthodoxy. Once installed, this package can be activated in later discussions. Telegram thus manufactures usable memory at high speed.

The pulpit model also explains the final prayer. The post does not merely say that the Russian army should take Kyiv. It asks readers to pray for it. This transforms military desire into devotional expression. The reader is invited to align spiritual hope with battlefield conquest. The prayer becomes a ritual of political belonging. To pray for the removal of Mazepa and Zelensky is to place oneself inside the sacred-imperial community imagined by the post.

Such rhetoric is powerful because it relieves moral discomfort. War involves destruction, death, displacement, and uncertainty. If military conquest can be framed as liberation of a holy city from traitors and desecrators, then violence is morally transfigured. It becomes cleansing rather than aggression. The Telegram pulpit performs that transfiguration through language.

Yet the same structure can reveal the weakness of the argument. A claim that requires so much moral compression may be avoiding historical complexity. The more the post insists on curse, treason, and desecration, the more one should ask what it is suppressing. Why not mention Mazepa's patronage? Why rely on the horse legend? Why collapse a bust into a sacred violation? Why move so quickly from commemoration to military prayer? These omissions show that the text's purpose is not truth-seeking but alignment.

Telegram as wartime pulpit therefore matters because it is where historical memory becomes immediate emotion. Mazepa is not presented as a subject for study. He is presented as a sign of the enemy's depravity. The Lavra is not presented as a complex sacred site with layered histories. It is presented as a violated shrine. The Russian army is not presented as a military force pursuing state objectives. It is presented as the agent of liberation. The post preaches a world in which all these meanings are already settled.

6.2 The Kiev dictator formula

The phrase "Kiev dictator" is not a casual insult. It is a compact ideological formula. It does several things simultaneously: it delegitimizes Volodymyr Zelensky, rejects the Ukrainian spelling "Kyiv," places the Ukrainian capital inside a Russian linguistic frame, and prepares the reader to see Ukrainian state action as unlawful, anti-sacred, and temporary. In two words, the post performs an entire politics of recognition and denial.

The spelling “Kiev” matters because names of places are never merely technical in wartime. “Kyiv” asserts Ukrainian language, sovereignty, and self-naming. “Kiev” carries the older Russian-derived international usage and, in a pro-Russian polemical context, often signals refusal to accept the Ukrainian frame. The issue is not that every use of “Kiev” in all contexts is malicious. The issue is that, in this specific rhetorical environment, the spelling participates in a broader refusal. The city is linguistically pulled back into the imperial map.

The word “dictator” performs a different function. It denies democratic legitimacy and casts Zelensky as a usurper. If he is a dictator, then his acts are not the acts of a sovereign state defending itself, but the provocations of an illegitimate ruler. His decisions about monuments, religious sites, and national memory become evidence of tyranny rather than governance. The label spares the writer from engaging the political complexity of wartime Ukraine. The conclusion is built into the title.

Together, “Kiev dictator” creates a frame in which Kyiv is not truly Ukrainian and Zelensky is not truly legitimate. This is the necessary precondition for the final prayer that the Russian army will “liberate Kiev.” If the city is Kyiv, capital of a sovereign Ukraine, then Russian entry looks like conquest. If it is Kiev, sacred city held by a dictator and polluted by traitors, then Russian entry can be narrated as liberation. The spelling and title prepare the military conclusion.

The formula also connects Zelensky to Mazepa. Mazepa is the old traitor; Zelensky is the new one. Mazepa broke his oath to Peter; Zelensky breaks the unity of the Russian Orthodox civilizational world. Mazepa allied with Sweden; Zelensky aligns with the West. Mazepa was anathematized; Zelensky is implied to be anti-Orthodox. The post does not need to state all these parallels explicitly. The formula invites the reader to feel them.

This is how propaganda creates typologies. A living enemy is placed inside an old category. Zelensky becomes not an individual political leader with specific policies, constraints, and wartime decisions, but an instance of a recurring anti-Russian type. The type is the Ukrainian traitor who collaborates with foreign enemies against Moscow and desecrates sacred unity. Mazepa supplies the archetype. Zelensky supplies the present target.

The formula also erases Jewishness, secularity, nationalism, democracy, war leadership, and other complexities by replacing them with a single role: dictator of Kiev. That role is useful because it is morally simple. It does not require the reader to consider Ukrainian electoral politics, Russian invasion, constitutional constraints under martial law, or the pluralism of Ukrainian society. It allows the conflict to be imagined as a captive sacred city ruled by a wicked man. The fantasy is politically powerful because it is emotionally clear.

“Kiev dictator” also fits the wider vocabulary of regime-change rhetoric. If a leader is a dictator, then his removal appears morally desirable. If his capital is named in the opponent’s language,

then its capture appears less like violation of another country and more like restoration of rightful order. The phrase thus prepares the reader to accept external force as internal liberation. It turns invasion into rescue.

The Lavra amplifies this formula because it allows Zelensky's alleged dictatorship to be expressed as spiritual aggression. He is not merely ruling badly. He is said to be dishonoring a holy place. This makes the political illegitimacy sacred. A dictator who desecrates the Lavra becomes worse than a secular tyrant. He becomes an enemy of the holy. The call for removal then acquires religious urgency.

The formula also depends on a selective view of the Russian Orthodox Church. The post speaks of a "1000 year old Russian Orthodox Church," folding Kyivan Christian antiquity into Russian ecclesiastical identity. This allows the Lavra to be treated as an inheritance violated by the Ukrainian state. The phrase "Kiev dictator" fits this larger absorption. Kyiv's own name, history, and sovereignty are drawn into a Russian-centered narrative. The city becomes sacred Russian patrimony temporarily held by an illegitimate Ukrainian ruler.

A careful historical approach must unpack this compression. The Christian history of Kyiv is older than the Moscow Patriarchate. The Lavra's sacred significance cannot be simply equated with modern Russian ecclesiastical control. Ukrainian Orthodoxy has its own history, and Mazepa's patronage belongs to that history. By using "Kiev dictator," the post bypasses these distinctions and places the entire sacred inheritance under a Russian-imperial sign.

The formula also shows how language polices belonging. To say "Kyiv" is to recognize, at least linguistically, Ukraine's self-designation. To say "Kiev" in this polemical frame is to refuse that recognition. To say "president" is to acknowledge political office. To say "dictator" is to deny it. The post's first move is therefore not historical but nominal. It renames the actors and the place so that the desired conclusion becomes easier to reach.

This connects directly to the paper's broader thesis about names. Mazepa/Mazeppa is a battlefield name. Kyiv/Kiev is also a battlefield name. Zelensky/president/dictator is a battlefield title. The struggle over language precedes the struggle over interpretation. Once the names are fixed in the polemical register, the story almost tells itself. The "Kiev dictator" installs the cursed traitor in the holy Lavra; the Russian army must liberate the city. The grammar produces the politics.

The phrase also works by contempt. It refuses the dignity of the opponent's own self-presentation. This is common in wartime rhetoric. Enemies are rarely named as they name themselves. They are renamed as criminals, puppets, usurpers, fascists, terrorists, separatists, occupiers, or traitors. Such renaming is not decorative. It shapes what actions against them become imaginable. One negotiates with a president; one removes a dictator.

In this sense, “Kiev dictator” is not merely propaganda against Zelensky. It is propaganda for a future action. It prepares the moral ground for regime removal. By the end of the post, the reader is asked to pray that the Russian army will remove Zelensky and other traitors. That prayer would sound more openly aggressive if directed against the elected president of Kyiv, capital of Ukraine. It sounds more righteous when directed against the “Kiev dictator.” The phrase has already done the moral laundering.

The formula also creates continuity with imperial history. Peter the Great’s authority is treated as rightful; Mazepa’s break is treason. The Russian Orthodox Church’s inherited judgment is treated as sacred; Ukrainian restoration is provocation. The city is called Kiev; the leader is called dictator. Every linguistic choice points toward the same conclusion: legitimate authority flows from the Russian-imperial sacred center, not from the Ukrainian state. The formula is small, but the worldview behind it is large.

Analyzing the phrase does not require denying that wartime governments can be criticized, or that Ukraine’s religious policies can be debated, or that Zelensky’s decisions are beyond scrutiny. The point is that this specific formula does not invite scrutiny. It forecloses it. It does not say, “Here is why this policy is wrong.” It says, “The illegitimate ruler of Kiev has committed another shameful act.” The verdict precedes the evidence.

The “Kiev dictator” formula therefore belongs to the same rhetorical family as “Mazepa the traitor.” Both are names that contain judgments. Both reduce complex historical and political realities to moral labels. Both make later argument almost unnecessary. Once Mazepa is traitor and Zelensky is dictator, the reader is no longer asked to evaluate. The reader is asked to condemn.

6.3 Treason, adultery, and anathema as a single weapon

The Telegram post’s most efficient move is the fusion of treason, adultery, and anathema into a single weapon. Each accusation belongs to a different moral sphere. Treason is political. Adultery is sexual and social. Anathema is religious. By joining them, the post creates a total condemnation of Mazepa. He is not wrong in one way. He is corrupt at every level. His body, oath, soul, and political memory are all marked as false.

This stacking of accusations is a classic technique of demonization. One charge may be debated. Several charges from different moral registers create an atmosphere of certainty. If Mazepa is only a political rebel, one might ask whether his rebellion had cause. If he is only the subject of an adultery legend, one might question the legend’s basis. If he is only anathematized, one might examine the political context of the church judgment. But if he is adulterer, traitor, oath-breaker, and cursed enemy of Orthodoxy all at once, the combined weight discourages inquiry. The audience feels that the case is closed.

The adultery charge comes first because it degrades Mazepa before politics begins. It places him in a scene of naked humiliation. This is not accidental. Sexual shame is one of the oldest tools of public disqualification. A sexually dishonored person can be made to seem unfit for honor in any domain. The charge reaches beneath argument to the body. It says that the man is shameful in himself.

The treason charge then elevates private shame into public betrayal. Mazepa is not merely a man who violated a marriage or household. He is a man who violated his oath to the tsar. The move from adultery to treason suggests continuity of character. The same disloyal essence appears in bedroom and battlefield, in household and empire. This is rhetorically powerful because it turns political choice into moral nature.

The anathema completes the structure by placing divine or ecclesiastical condemnation over the political and sexual accusations. The man is not only shameful and disloyal; he is cursed. The religious verdict gives the polemic a sense of finality. It implies that the matter was settled not only by Peter's victory, but by the church's judgment. To honor Mazepa after that is not merely historically mistaken. It is rebellion against sacred memory.

The three charges also correspond to three violated orders: marriage, monarchy, and church. Adultery violates marital order. Treason violates sovereign order. Anathema marks violation of ecclesiastical order. The post's implied argument is that Mazepa is the enemy of order as such. He cannot be safely remembered because his very name represents disorder. This is why his presence at the Lavra is framed as intolerable. A holy place is an ordered space; Mazepa is disorder.

The fusion also allows the post to avoid the strongest counterpoint: Mazepa's Orthodox patronage. If the reader is focused on adultery, treason, and anathema, there is little room to consider church building, monastic support, printing, architecture, or the material history of the Lavra. The total condemnation pushes patronage out of view. The man who helped build sacred space is reimagined only as the man who pollutes it.

This is the central injustice of the rhetorical weapon. It does not simply accuse Mazepa of real or alleged faults. It uses those faults to erase his contributions. A complex figure becomes a stain. The stain is then used to define every place his name appears. At the Lavra, the question of patronage should be unavoidable. The post avoids it by making Mazepa morally unthinkable before the reader reaches the site-specific history.

The adultery legend is especially useful because it is visual and memorable. The anathema is abstract to many readers. The Great Northern War is historically distant. But a naked man tied to a horse is instantly imaginable. By beginning there, the post gives the reader an image that can carry the rest of the accusations. The body becomes the poster for the politics.

Treason, however, is the accusation that connects Mazepa most directly to the present. The post calls him an “ungrateful traitor” who broke his oath to Peter and sided with the Swedes. This is meant to resonate with the current Russian-aligned view of Ukraine as ungrateful, Western-backed, and treacherous toward a shared civilizational inheritance. Mazepa’s Sweden becomes Zelensky’s West. Peter’s Russia becomes modern Russia. The old structure is updated without needing explicit explanation.

The term “ungrateful” is important because it frames hierarchy as benevolence. In this view, Peter had favored Mazepa, just as Russia is imagined to have historically protected or nurtured Ukraine. Rebellion therefore becomes not self-defense but ingratitude. The subordinate is blamed not merely for disobedience, but for failing to appreciate the superior’s gifts. This emotional logic is common in imperial rhetoric. It recasts domination as generosity and resistance as betrayal.

The anathema adds the force of sacred memory. It suggests that Mazepa’s condemnation was not merely state propaganda but church truth. Yet the historical relation between church condemnation and imperial power cannot be ignored. When a church authority operates within the orbit of a victorious state, its judgments may carry political functions. This does not mean all ecclesiastical judgments are reducible to politics. It means that Mazepa’s anathema must be understood in its historical context rather than treated as a timeless fact floating above power.

By invoking anathema without context, the post uses religious memory as a weapon of closure. The curse becomes a wall against reinterpretation. If Mazepa is cursed, then restoring him is automatically impious. This prevents the reader from asking whether the curse itself was part of the imperial punishment following Poltava. The anathema is presented not as an object of historical analysis, but as a settled verdict to be obeyed.

The combined accusation also functions by contamination. If Mazepa is cursed, then his bust contaminates the Lavra. If Zelensky installs or honors him, then Zelensky shares in the contamination. If Ukrainian authorities support the act, then the Ukrainian state itself appears anti-Orthodox. If the Russian army removes them, then removal becomes purification. The weapon expands outward from one historical figure to an entire modern political order.

This is how memory war works. The goal is not only to define the past, but to use the past to classify the present. Mazepa is not attacked for his own sake alone. He is used to name the current enemy. The post makes him a bridge of guilt. His alleged adultery, treason, and curse are extended symbolically to Zelensky and to Ukraine’s post-2014 and post-2022 national project. The dead man becomes a medium through which the living are condemned.

The fusion of charges also has emotional range. Adultery evokes disgust and mockery. Treason evokes anger. Anathema evokes fear and reverence. Sacred desecration evokes outrage. Prayer

for liberation evokes hope. The post moves the reader through these emotions quickly. It is not a dry statement of opinion. It is an affective sequence designed to produce alignment with Russian military and religious-political aims.

The danger of such fusion is that it makes correction difficult. If one says the horse legend is doubtful, the polemicist can fall back on treason. If one contextualizes treason, he can fall back on anathema. If one contextualizes anathema, he can fall back on the Lavra as holy space. If one explains the Lavra patronage, he can accuse the explainer of defending a cursed traitor. The accusations form a defensive system. Each protects the others.

A scholarly answer must therefore separate what the post fuses. It must distinguish legend from biography, political rebellion from moral essence, ecclesiastical condemnation from divine certainty, sacred patronage from desecration, and historical restoration from wartime provocation. The act of separation is itself a resistance to propaganda. Propaganda fuses in order to compel feeling. History separates in order to understand.

At the same time, one should not underestimate the emotional appeal of the fusion. Human beings often prefer moral clarity to complexity, especially during war. A single villain who is sexually shameful, politically treacherous, spiritually cursed, and presently weaponized by the enemy is easier to hate than a complicated early modern patron-politician. The post gives its audience a usable villain. Its success lies in that usability.

The fusion of treason, adultery, and anathema is therefore not a side feature of the Mazepa controversy. It is the rhetorical core. It explains why the Lavra bust can be made to feel like desecration rather than restoration. It explains why Zelensky can be linked to Mazepa as a modern traitor. It explains why the Russian army can be imagined as sacred remover of pollution. And it shows how old myths remain politically alive when they can be joined into a single weapon.

6.4 Prayer as political violence

The final sentence of the Telegram post is the most revealing. It asks readers to pray that the Russian army will soon “liberate Kiev” and remove Mazepa, Zelensky, and other traitors. This is not merely devotional language attached to political opinion. It is a sacralized wish for military conquest and regime removal. The prayer turns political violence into an act of religious hope.

Prayer, in ordinary religious life, can express dependence, repentance, gratitude, intercession, longing, and trust. But prayer can also be politicized. When a prayer asks for an army to take a city and remove named enemies, it becomes part of the moral preparation for violence. It does not fire artillery, but it sanctifies the desire for the artillery’s success. It asks the reader to imagine military action as answer to prayer.

The word “liberate” is central. It transforms the Russian army from invader into rescuer. If Kyiv is occupied by a dictator and polluted by traitors, then Russian conquest can be narrated as deliverance. The language of liberation conceals the coercive reality of military force. It implies that the city’s true self waits beneath illegitimate Ukrainian control and will be restored when Russian troops arrive. This is the theological-political fantasy at the heart of the post.

The prayer also links removal of a monument or bust with removal of living political enemies. Mazepa, being dead, can be removed symbolically. Zelensky, being alive, would have to be removed politically or militarily. The phrase “along with any other traitors” broadens the target still further. It creates an open category of enemies whose removal is desired. The sacred outrage over Mazepa thus becomes a gateway to imagining a wider purge.

This is why the sentence should be read carefully. It begins with religious language but ends with political elimination. It uses prayer to soften and sanctify a violent wish. The reader is not told to analyze, debate, vote, or negotiate. The reader is told to pray for an army to solve the problem. The battlefield becomes the mechanism of purification.

Such language has a long history. States and movements often present military action as holy duty, crusade, liberation, defense of the faithful, protection of sacred places, or punishment of traitors. The form varies by tradition, but the structure is similar. Violence is made righteous by placing it inside a sacred story. The enemy is not merely an opponent but a desecrator. The army is not merely an instrument of state power but an agent of moral restoration.

The Mazepa post follows this pattern exactly. First, it establishes desecration: a cursed traitor is placed inside a holy Lavra. Second, it identifies the living agent of desecration: Zelensky. Third, it names the endangered sacred community: the Russian Orthodox Church. Fourth, it proposes the army as liberator. The prayer is the bridge from outrage to force. It moves the reader from seeing a wrong to desiring military correction.

The danger is that sacred language can numb moral scrutiny. If violence is imagined as liberation of holy space, then the suffering caused by that violence can be minimized or ignored. The actual inhabitants of Kyiv disappear behind the image of “Kiev” awaiting liberation. Their political preferences, fears, homes, churches, and lives are subordinated to the symbolic drama. The city becomes an object to be redeemed rather than a community of persons.

This is one of the central problems of imperial sacred geography. A city may be loved as symbol while its living inhabitants are denied agency. Kyiv can be revered as holy origin while Ukrainians who claim it as their capital are treated as usurpers. The prayer for liberation reveals this contradiction. It claims to love the city, but it imagines saving the city through an army sent against the state and people who live there.

The inclusion of Mazepa in the removal prayer is also telling. A bust or memorial is not dangerous in itself. Its danger lies in what it signifies: the restoration of Ukrainian authority over memory. To remove Mazepa would be to restore the old verdict. To remove Zelensky would be to restore political subordination. The two removals are linked because memory and sovereignty are linked. The prayer seeks both symbolic and political reversal.

This is why monuments matter in war. A statue, bust, or plaque may seem minor compared with territory, weapons, and casualties. But monuments declare who belongs to the future. They instruct public memory. They tell citizens and enemies alike which past will be honored. To pray for the removal of Mazepa is to pray that Ukraine's reinterpretation of its past will fail. To pray for the removal of Zelensky is to pray that Ukraine's present sovereignty will fail. The two are part of the same desire.

The phrase "any other traitors" expands the moral category beyond named figures. It implies that those aligned with Zelensky, with Ukrainian sovereignty, or with Mazepa's restoration may also be traitors. Such open-ended categories are dangerous because they allow repression to spread. Once a war is framed as the removal of traitors from holy space, the boundary of treason can be widened at will. The prayer becomes not only anti-Zelensky, but potentially anti-Ukrainian in a much broader sense.

This does not mean every person who shares or likes such a post consciously desires mass violence. Digital rhetoric often travels faster than reflection. People may respond to the emotional surface: outrage, faith, patriotism, anger, nostalgia, anti-Zelensky sentiment, or love of Orthodoxy. But the text itself still matters. Its logic still points toward military purification. Responsible analysis must examine that logic even when individual motivations vary.

The prayer also reveals how the past authorizes the future. Mazepa's old treason is used to classify present enemies. The anathema is used to sanctify outrage. The Lavra's holiness is used to intensify the perceived offense. These historical and religious elements then authorize a future act: Russian military liberation. The post is therefore temporally complete. It moves from old sin to present desecration to future cleansing.

Theologically, this is a dangerous use of prayer because it risks confusing God's will with imperial desire. To pray for justice in war is one thing. To pray for the conquest of a city under the banner of removing traitors is another. The latter can turn prayer into a weapon of political imagination. It trains the heart to desire the defeat and removal of enemies as sacred fulfillment.

Politically, the prayer functions as regime-change rhetoric. It denies the legitimacy of the existing Ukrainian government and asks for an external army to remove it. The religious language does not make this less political. It makes it more potent. It gives the political aim a

sacred aura. In doing so, it helps merge Russian military objectives with Orthodox-imperial mythology.

The prayer also completes the post's emotional arc. Outrage alone can exhaust itself. Prayer channels outrage into hope. The reader is not left merely angry about Mazepa at the Lavra. The reader is given something to desire: the Russian army entering Kyiv, removing the traitors, and restoring sacred order. This is psychologically satisfying because it turns grievance into imagined resolution.

Yet the imagined resolution depends on erasure. It erases Ukrainian sovereignty, Ukrainian interpretations of Mazepa, the Lavra's Ukrainian history, Mazepa's patronage, and the lived reality of Kyiv as a Ukrainian capital under attack. It replaces all of that with a mythic scene: holy Kiev captured from traitors and returned to rightful order. The simplicity is powerful because the erasure is thorough.

A careful response must therefore name the prayer for what it is: sacralized political violence. It is not merely a pious wish. It is a wish for military force to settle a dispute over memory, sovereignty, and sacred space. It turns the Russian army into the instrument of divine or providential correction. This is precisely why the post belongs in the paper. It shows how Mazepa's name still has the power to connect history, myth, church, propaganda, and war.

The section's conclusion is not that readers must hate Aussie Cossack or dismiss everyone who follows him. The conclusion is more serious. The post demonstrates how easily inherited religious and historical symbols can be arranged to bless conquest. A dead hetman, a legendary horse, an imperial anathema, a holy monastery, and a modern president are fused into a single drama that ends with a prayer for an army. That fusion is the Telegram memory war in its pure form.

Mazepa's presence at the Lavra challenges the old imperial curse. The Telegram prayer tries to restore that curse by force. Between those two acts lies the modern struggle over Ukraine's history: whether memory can be repaired by public recognition, or whether imperial verdicts will be reimposed through sacred language and military power. In this struggle, the name Mazepa is not passive. It is one of the weapons.

7. Mazeppa and Mazepa as a Theory of Cultural Transmission

The journey from Mazepa to Mazeppa and back again is not merely an odd historical curiosity. It offers a compact theory of cultural transmission. A name begins as biography, becomes political accusation, passes into literary myth, descends into spectacle and comedy, survives as local popular memory, and returns as a weapon in wartime sacred politics. At each stage, the name is

altered. Yet it remains recognizable enough to carry force. This is how cultural memory often works: not by preserving the past intact, but by allowing fragments to survive through transformation.

Mazepa is therefore useful because his name has traveled through several distinct systems without becoming fully owned by any one of them. Historians may seek the Cossack hetman. Russian imperial memory may insist on the traitor. Ukrainian national memory may restore the patron and defender of autonomy. Romantic literature may prefer the naked rider tied to the wild horse. Tulsa television may remember the absurd Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi. Telegram propaganda may recombine the traitor, adulterer, and anathema into a wartime curse. None of these uses is identical with the others, yet none is wholly disconnected.

This layered survival shows that names are not inert labels. They are portable structures of association. A name can carry history, myth, shame, honor, comedy, and violence. It can be emptied of one meaning and filled with another, but the earlier meaning may remain latent. That latency is crucial. Tulsa's Mazeppa could function as comic nonsense for viewers who knew nothing of Ivan Mazepa, yet the older history remained buried inside the word. When modern events brought Mazepa back into public controversy, the comic name suddenly became a doorway into a deeper genealogy.

The paper's central claim is that Mazeppa and Mazepa are not separate subjects, but two phases of one cultural process. Mazepa belongs more directly to the historical and political field: Ukraine, Muscovy, Peter, Poltava, church patronage, anathema, and sovereignty. Mazeppa belongs more directly to the mythic and performative field: horse, adultery, exposure, Romantic ordeal, theatrical spectacle, burlesque, cartoon, and comedy. But the two forms continuously contaminate each other. The political Mazepa can still be attacked through the scandalous Mazeppa legend. The comic Mazeppa still carries the fossil of the political Mazepa.

The name's journey also demonstrates that cultural memory is not controlled by experts. Historians may correct the record, but they do not govern the imagination alone. Poets, cartoonists, actors, propagandists, church authorities, presidents, television hosts, and anonymous social media users all participate in the making of public memory. Each chooses what can be used. Each simplifies. Each translates. Each adds or suppresses. The result is not a clean archive, but a contested field of symbolic reuse.

This does not mean all uses are equally responsible. Some transformations are playful; others are malicious. Some recover suppressed truth; others exploit inherited falsehood. Tulsa's Dr. Mazeppa is a comic mutation, not a political program. The Telegram denunciation is a wartime act of accusation. Zelensky's Lavra commemoration is a state act of historical restoration.

Byron's Mazeppa is a Romantic transformation. These uses differ morally and intellectually. But all show the same principle: a name survives by being made useful to new communities.

The strange power of Mazepa lies in the fact that he can be both too historical and not historical enough. To Ukrainians, he is historical enough to matter as a patron and political ancestor. To Russian imperial memory, he is historical enough to remain condemned as traitor. To Western popular culture, he became not historical enough to require accuracy, but famous enough to be used as spectacle. To Tulsa, he was almost entirely detached from history, yet not detached from atmosphere. To Telegram propaganda, he becomes historical again, but in a compressed and weaponized form.

This movement suggests that cultural transmission often proceeds through partial forgetting. Total memory is too heavy to travel widely. Total forgetting leaves no trace. What travels is the memorable fragment: the horse, the curse, the strange name, the traitor label, the comic sound, the holy site, the restored bust. These fragments are small enough to move but charged enough to matter. They can be reassembled later into new narratives. The danger is that the fragment may be mistaken for the whole.

Mazepa's name also reveals the competition between archive and affect. The archive asks for dates, documents, patronage records, political context, literary genealogy, and ecclesiastical history. Affect asks how the name feels. Does it feel noble, cursed, ridiculous, foreign, sacred, treacherous, erotic, or heroic? Public memory often follows affect before archive. That is why the wild-horse myth can overpower political history, and why the word "traitor" can erase patronage. The archive corrects slowly; affect travels instantly.

The task of this paper has been to hold these layers together without collapsing them. Ivan Mazepa should not be reduced to the Telegram caricature. Mazeppa should not be treated as reliable biography. Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi should not be mistaken for a deliberate Ukrainian political reference. The Lavra bust should not be confused with a simple act of secular nationalism. Each layer needs distinction. Yet the distinctions should not hide the deeper continuity: the same name moves through them all.

This section therefore gathers the paper's argument into a broader theory. Cultural transmission is not linear inheritance. It is mutation under pressure. Political defeat, literary desire, theatrical spectacle, comic improvisation, sacred restoration, and wartime propaganda all apply different pressures to the name. The name bends but does not vanish. It becomes many things without ceasing to be recognizable. This is why Mazepa still matters. He is not only a man from the past. He is a test of who controls the meaning of the past.

7.1 One name, four systems

The name Mazepa/Mazeppa functions across at least four major systems of meaning: historical-political memory, literary-mythic imagination, comic-popular culture, and wartime propaganda. Each system selects a different Mazepa. Each has its own needs, its own evidence, its own distortions, and its own audience. To understand the name's afterlife, one must see how these systems interact rather than treating any one of them as the whole story.

The first system is historical-political memory. Here the central figure is Ivan Mazepa, Cossack hetman, political actor, patron, and participant in the Great Northern War. This system asks about the Hetmanate, Peter the Great, Sweden, Poltava, autonomy, empire, and church patronage. It is the system closest to archival history. It deals with decisions, institutions, alliances, and consequences. It is also the system in which the deepest Russia-Ukraine dispute is rooted.

Within historical-political memory, Mazepa divides into rival interpretations. In Russian imperial memory, he is the traitor who broke faith with Peter. In Ukrainian memory, he can be the statesman who attempted to preserve autonomy from imperial centralization. These interpretations are not simple disagreements over personality. They reflect incompatible visions of political obligation. Was Mazepa's highest duty to the tsar or to the Hetmanate? Was Ukraine a subject of its own history or a subordinate component of a greater Russian order? The name forces these questions.

The second system is literary-mythic imagination. Here the figure becomes Mazeppa, the rider tied to the wild horse. The historical setting recedes. The mythic image dominates. This system does not ask first about treaties, autonomy, or church construction. It asks about passion, punishment, exposure, nature, motion, suffering, and survival. The name becomes aesthetic rather than administrative, bodily rather than institutional, legendary rather than documentary.

The literary-mythic system is powerful because it produces images that outlive explanations. A reader may forget why Mazepa opposed Peter, but remember the horse. The myth transforms political biography into archetype. Mazeppa becomes the punished lover, the bound rebel, the man carried by forces beyond his control. This system can degrade him as sinner or elevate him as Romantic sufferer. Its ambiguity is part of its strength.

The third system is comic-popular culture. Here the name becomes available for jokes, cartoons, burlesque, and local performance. The horse legend is reduced, parodied, or detached from its original seriousness. The boy tied to a donkey in an old comic strip is a perfect emblem of this system. The grand punishment becomes slapstick. The sublime horse becomes a ridiculous animal. The tragic rider becomes a comic victim. Eventually the name becomes Dr. Mazeppa

Pompazoidi, a Tulsa television persona whose connection to the historical Mazepa is indirect but real.

Comic-popular culture is not concerned with accuracy in the scholarly sense. It is concerned with effect. Does the name sound funny? Does it suggest mystery? Does it carry theatrical energy? Does it give the performer a usable mask? In Dr. Mazeppa's case, the answer was yes. The name had been emptied enough to become comic, but not so emptied that it lost atmosphere. Comedy thrives on that middle condition: a fragment remains charged but no longer fully understood.

The fourth system is wartime propaganda. Here the name is recombined for immediate political use. Telegram rhetoric does not care about the full historical Mazepa or the full literary Mazeppa. It selects the most useful fragments: adultery, horse, treason, oath-breaking, anathema, Lavra, Zelensky, Russian liberation. These fragments are arranged into a moral weapon. The aim is not interpretation but mobilization.

The propaganda system is parasitic on the other systems. It borrows the historical-political traitor from Russian imperial memory. It borrows the adulterer and horse from literary-mythic memory. It borrows sacred authority from church history. It borrows immediacy from digital media. It borrows outrage from the current war. Its power comes from combination. It does not need to prove each layer independently because the emotional force of the fused image carries the message.

These four systems do not replace one another chronologically. They coexist. A Ukrainian historian may discuss Mazepa as patron on the same day a Russian-aligned channel denounces him as traitor, a Tulsa viewer remembers Dr. Mazeppa, and a reader encounters Byron's Mazeppa. The name is not owned by one time period. It is distributed across memory communities. Each community activates a different part of the inheritance.

The systems also influence one another. The literary myth can feed propaganda by supplying sexual humiliation. Popular comedy can preserve the name long after literary prestige fades. Historical restoration can provoke propagandistic backlash. Wartime polemic can force readers to revisit the archive. A Tulsa joke can become unexpectedly relevant when Mazepa returns to world news. Transmission is not a straight line but a network of reactivations.

The difference between Mazepa and Mazeppa helps map these systems. Mazepa is the spelling of historical-political return: Ukraine, Hetmanate, Lavra, statehood, imperial condemnation. Mazeppa is the spelling of mythic and popular drift: horse, poem, stage, comic strip, Tulsa persona. But the boundary is porous. Russian propaganda may invoke the Mazeppa horse while using the Mazepa political accusation. Tulsa's Dr. Mazeppa may unknowingly preserve the

historical name through the mythic spelling. The spellings mark tendencies, not sealed compartments.

The four-system model also explains why debates about Mazepa can feel confused. Participants may be operating in different systems without recognizing it. One person asks whether the horse legend is factual. Another asks whether Mazepa betrayed Peter. Another asks whether he supported the Lavra. Another remembers a Tulsa comedian. Another sees a symbol of Ukrainian sovereignty. Another sees blasphemy. Without distinguishing systems, the conversation collapses into mutual incomprehension.

A responsible article must therefore say which system it is analyzing at each moment. When discussing the Hetmanate, it must use historical-political categories. When discussing the horse legend, it must use literary-mythic categories. When discussing Dr. Mazeppa, it must use comic-popular categories. When discussing Telegram, it must use propaganda analysis. Confusing these levels produces error. Separating them reveals the full richness of the name's afterlife.

The four systems also reveal a moral hierarchy of use. Historical-political memory can be selective, but it remains accountable to evidence. Literary myth can be historically unreliable, but it may produce symbolic truth about suffering and fate. Comic-popular culture can be frivolous, but it often preserves fragments without hatred. Wartime propaganda is the most dangerous because it weaponizes selective memory for present hostility. The same name can be transformed innocently, imaginatively, or violently.

The survival of Mazepa/Mazeppa across these systems shows that cultural signs endure when they are adaptable. A name that belonged only to a narrow administrative record might disappear from public imagination. A name that can be traitor, hero, lover, rider, joke doctor, patron, and curse can survive for centuries. Adaptability gives the name life. It also makes it vulnerable to abuse.

The four-system model is therefore the paper's central analytical tool. It allows Mazepa to be studied without reducing him to one use. It explains how a Ukrainian hetman can become a Romantic rider, how a Romantic rider can become a Tulsa comic persona, and how both can be reactivated by wartime polemic. The name is not a straight line from past to present. It is a crossing point where different cultural systems meet, collide, and compete.

7.2 The comic and the sacred

The comic and the sacred may appear to be opposites, but the Mazepa/Mazeppa story shows how closely they can be linked. Sacred memory seeks reverence, continuity, authority, and moral seriousness. Comic memory seeks deflation, surprise, exaggeration, and release. Yet both depend on ritual, repetition, performance, and community recognition. Both give names a life beyond ordinary speech. Both can turn a person into a presence.

The Kyiv Pechersk Lavra represents the sacred register in the strongest sense. It is a holy site, a monastic complex, a symbol of Orthodox antiquity, and a contested inheritance. To place Mazepa there is to speak in the language of sacred memory. It says that this man belongs to the historical and spiritual fabric of the place. The act is solemn, public, and restorative. It asks viewers to reconsider inherited condemnation and recognize patronage.

Tulsa's Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi represents the comic register. He belongs to late-night television, horror hosting, local performance, parody, and absurd naming. He does not ask for reverence in the ordinary sense. He asks for laughter, recognition, and affectionate memory. Yet his role also has ritual elements. The host appears, the show begins, the audience enters a shared world, the strange is mediated through performance, and repetition builds loyalty. Comic memory forms community through recurring absurdity.

The connection between the two registers lies in performance. Sacred memory is performed through liturgy, procession, icon, architecture, chant, pilgrimage, and commemoration. Comic memory is performed through costume, timing, voice, catchphrase, sketch, broadcast, and audience recall. Both forms require embodiment. A name must be given a face, a place, a sound, or a ritual. Mazepa at the Lavra receives a bust. Dr. Mazeppa receives a costume and screen presence. Each gives the name a body.

This does not mean the sacred and comic uses are equal in purpose. A memorial bust in a monastery complex and a horror host on regional television do not carry the same moral or historical weight. But they reveal a shared mechanism: memory becomes durable when it is staged. The past needs scenes. The Lavra provides one kind of scene. Tulsa television provides another. Both allow the name to be encountered rather than merely read.

Comedy often arises from the fall of sacred or aristocratic seriousness into ordinary absurdity. The Western Mazeppa legend had grandeur: forbidden love, punishment, wild horse, sublime landscape, Romantic suffering. Popular culture lowered that grandeur into cartoons, burlesque, and jokes. Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi belongs to the final comic lowering. The name still sounds grand, but the performance punctures the grandeur. This is why it works. The audience hears theatrical inflation and enjoys its collapse.

Sacred memory, by contrast, can restore seriousness to a name that has been degraded. Ukrainian commemoration of Mazepa at the Lavra reverses the comic and propagandistic lowering. It does not remember him as horse victim or joke name. It remembers him as patron. It returns dignity to a name long marked by humiliation, curse, and caricature. The sacred register therefore performs a counter-movement: not deflation, but elevation.

The same name can therefore move downward into comedy and upward into restoration. This vertical movement is part of cultural transmission. A noble name becomes ridiculous. A

ridiculous name leads back to hidden history. A cursed name is restored to sacred memory. A sacred restoration provokes renewed mockery and curse. The name is never fixed at one altitude. It rises and falls depending on who speaks it and why.

The comic can also protect against propaganda by revealing the absurdity of overinflated claims. Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi unintentionally exposes how strange the name already was in Western popular memory. The Tulsa persona reminds us that solemn symbols can become theatrical fragments, and that no imperial memory fully controls its own afterlife. A name Moscow curses can become an Oklahoma joke. That fact does not disprove the seriousness of history, but it does puncture the fantasy of total symbolic control.

At the same time, comedy can contribute to forgetting. A viewer who knows only Dr. Mazeppa may never learn Ivan Mazepa. The comic mask may obscure the historical face. This is not malicious, but it is a real effect. Popular culture often preserves names while evacuating context. The challenge is to use comic memory as an entrance rather than an endpoint. From Dr. Mazeppa one can travel backward to Mazeppa, then to Mazepa. The joke becomes a doorway.

The sacred has its own danger. It can harden memory into untouchable myth. A sacred-national restoration can produce reverence so strong that complexity disappears. Mazepa can become too clean, too prophetic, too perfectly aligned with modern Ukraine. Just as Russian imperial memory reduces him to traitor, Ukrainian sacred memory can be tempted to reduce him to hero. Reverence can erase ambiguity as effectively as mockery can erase context.

The paper's approach therefore requires both comic humility and sacred seriousness. Comic humility reminds us that names mutate, grandeur decays, and human memory is often ridiculous. Sacred seriousness reminds us that names can carry real wounds, suppressed histories, and claims to justice. Mazepa/Mazeppa needs both. Without seriousness, the Lavra controversy becomes mere farce. Without comic awareness, the rhetoric of curse and sacred outrage becomes too easily hypnotic.

The comic and sacred also meet in the concept of the host. The horror host mediates between audience and uncanny film. The monastery mediates between believer and sacred tradition. The propagandist mediates between event and ideological interpretation. The president at a commemorative ceremony mediates between state and historical memory. Each figure introduces a world and tells the audience how to receive it. Dr. Mazeppa says, in effect, enter the comic uncanny. Zelensky's Lavra act says, enter restored Ukrainian sacred memory. Aussie Cossack says, enter outrage and pray for liberation.

These acts of hosting matter because the audience rarely encounters the name raw. It encounters the name framed. The frame determines whether Mazepa is laughed at, honored,

cursed, or studied. A frame can turn the same name into a joke, a hero, a demon, or a research problem. Cultural transmission is therefore also frame transmission. The name travels with interpretive instructions, even when those instructions are implicit.

The sacred and comic registers also share a dependence on repetition over time. One joke may amuse briefly; repeated performance creates beloved memory. One monument may be noticed; repeated visits create sacred familiarity. One Telegram post may provoke; repeated messages create ideological formation. Repetition turns event into tradition. Dr. Mazeppa became Tulsa memory because people saw and remembered him repeatedly. Mazepa at the Lavra may become restored memory if repeated public acknowledgment normalizes his presence.

The sacred can also be comic to outsiders, and the comic can be sacred to insiders. A local television character may appear silly to those outside Tulsa, but beloved to those who grew up with him. A national monument may appear propagandistic to outsiders, but restorative to those whose history was suppressed. This does not mean all insider attachments are immune from criticism. It means that meaning depends on community. The same object can be ridiculous, holy, offensive, or moving depending on the viewer's relation to the tradition.

The Mazepa/Mazeppa story therefore undermines any simple hierarchy between high and low culture. High Romantic art distorted the historical Mazepa through myth. Low comic culture preserved the name through absurdity. Sacred commemoration may restore historical patronage. Digital propaganda may degrade sacred language into a call for conquest. Cultural value does not always align neatly with cultural level. A cartoon can preserve a trace. A sermon-like post can distort. A joke can lead to scholarship. A monument can provoke inquiry.

The comic and sacred together show that memory is embodied in performance, not merely stored in information. People remember what they watch, repeat, laugh at, pray over, visit, curse, and defend. Mazeppa and Mazepa survived because the name could be performed in many ways. The wild horse was a performance of punishment. The Romantic poem was a performance of sublime suffering. The Tulsa show was a performance of absurd authority. The Lavra bust is a performance of restoration. The Telegram post is a performance of outrage.

This is why the article's pairing of Tulsa and Kyiv is not artificial. Tulsa's Dr. Mazeppa and Kyiv's Mazepa bust are two poles of the same cultural fact: names live by performance. One performance is comic-local; the other sacred-national. One reduces grandeur to laughter; the other restores dignity from condemnation. Both show that the afterlife of a name depends on the communities willing to stage it again.

7.3 The danger of inherited caricature

Inherited caricature is dangerous because it arrives already shaped for judgment. It tells the audience what to feel before the historical person can be encountered. In Mazepa's case, the caricature is especially powerful because it combines several simplifying images: the adulterer tied naked to a wild horse, the ungrateful traitor to Peter, the cursed man anathematized by the church, and the symbol of Ukrainian betrayal. Each image reduces him. Together, they nearly erase him.

A caricature differs from a simple error. An error can be corrected by supplying better information. A caricature is more resistant because it satisfies emotional needs. It makes a complex figure easy to hate, mock, dismiss, or fear. It gives the audience a stable moral object. Mazepa the patron and statesman requires thought. Mazepa the naked adulterer-traitor requires only contempt. That is why the caricature survives.

The wild-horse legend is the most vivid part of the caricature. Its historical uncertainty does little to weaken its cultural power because it operates as image, not evidence. The bound body becomes the whole man. Once the audience imagines him naked, punished, and helpless, it becomes harder to imagine him as a serious political actor or religious patron. The image shrinks the person before the argument begins.

The traitor label works similarly. It is a conclusion disguised as a name. To call Mazepa a traitor is not merely to state that he broke with Peter. It is to decide in advance that Peter held rightful claim over his loyalty and that no higher duty to the Hetmanate could justify resistance. The label smuggles an imperial political theory into a moral accusation. It does not ask whether Mazepa owed absolute loyalty to Peter; it assumes it.

The anathema adds spiritual force to the caricature. It implies that the political verdict was ratified by sacred authority. A person who might question the traitor label may hesitate before a church curse. The anathema therefore gives the caricature an aura of finality. Yet if the curse arose within a system deeply entangled with imperial power, then it too must be analyzed historically. Treating it as pure timeless truth reproduces the very memory structure under examination.

Inherited caricature becomes especially dangerous when it attaches to sacred space. If Mazepa is already imagined as adulterer, traitor, and cursed man, then his commemoration at the Lavra appears automatically obscene. The audience does not need to know whether he was a Lavra patron. The caricature has already decided that he does not belong. This is how caricature blocks evidence. It prevents the most relevant facts from being emotionally received.

Caricature also travels well because it is compact. "Mazepa the traitor" travels more easily than a careful account of the Cossack Hetmanate under the pressures of Petrine centralization. "Tied

naked to a wild horse" travels more easily than an explanation of the legend's literary development and doubtful factual basis. "Anathematized by the Orthodox Church" travels more easily than the history of ecclesiastical politics after Poltava. The shorter form wins in popular circulation.

Digital media intensifies this advantage. Telegram posts, social media captions, memes, and short videos reward the compressed caricature. They leave little room for layered explanation. A vivid insult can be shared instantly. A careful correction takes longer, feels less exciting, and reaches fewer people. This does not mean correction is useless. It means that inherited caricature has a structural advantage in modern media environments.

The danger is not only that people will believe false things. It is that they will inherit emotional reflexes. A reader may not know much about Mazepa, but may know that he should be despised. This reflex can then be attached to modern Ukraine, Zelensky, the Lavra, and the war. The old caricature becomes a present-day political instinct. It tells the reader which side is holy and which side is treacherous.

Caricature also permits moral laziness. It relieves the audience of the burden of complexity. If Mazepa is simply a traitor, there is no need to examine Ukrainian autonomy. If Zelensky is simply a dictator, there is no need to examine Ukrainian sovereignty or Russian invasion. If the Lavra is simply Russian Orthodox inheritance, there is no need to examine Kyivan sacred history or Ukrainian Orthodoxy. Caricature narrows the world to usable binaries.

This narrowing is particularly harmful in cases where the historical figure sits at a fault line. Borderland figures are almost always complicated. They negotiate among powers, languages, loyalties, and institutions. Their decisions may be ambiguous, self-interested, courageous, opportunistic, or tragic all at once. Caricature cannot tolerate such figures because they expose the inadequacy of simple imperial narratives. Mazepa is dangerous precisely because he cannot be honestly reduced to one role.

The inherited caricature of Mazepa also serves imperial memory by making Ukrainian autonomy appear immoral in advance. If the most famous early modern Ukrainian leader who resisted Moscow is a cursed traitor, then later Ukrainian resistance can be placed under the same suspicion. The caricature becomes genealogical. It says that Ukrainian separateness itself is born from betrayal. This is why Mazepa remains useful in contemporary propaganda. He supplies an old moral template for condemning new independence.

The same mechanism operates in reverse when caricature is replaced by hagiography. A nationalist memory that turns Mazepa into a flawless prophet of modern Ukraine also simplifies him. It may be more just than imperial demonization in restoring suppressed dignity, but it still risks flattening history. The danger of inherited caricature should therefore lead not to counter-

caricature, but to disciplined complexity. Mazepa must be rescued from the curse without being embalmed as a perfect hero.

Tulsa's Dr. Mazeppa offers a different lesson about caricature. The comic persona is a distortion, but not a hostile one. It does not seek to define Ivan Mazepa's moral worth. It uses the name as absurd sound and theatrical mask. This kind of distortion can still obscure history, but it does not carry the same political danger as the traitor-adulterer-anathema fusion. It is forgetful rather than accusatory. The difference matters.

The comic distortion may even help expose the absurdity of inherited caricature. Once one sees how far the name has traveled into donkey gags and horror-host comedy, it becomes harder to treat any single inherited image as self-evidently authoritative. The name's history of mutation warns us that what feels ancient and obvious may be the product of many transformations. The wild-horse image itself may be less historical memory than successful spectacle.

The antidote to inherited caricature is not sterile neutrality. It is layered reconstruction. One must recover Mazepa as political actor, church patron, defeated symbol, object of imperial condemnation, subject of Romantic myth, material for popular comedy, and weapon of modern propaganda. Only then can the caricature be seen in proportion. It is one layer, not the whole.

This layered reconstruction also allows moral judgment to become more honest. One can judge Mazepa's choices, ambitions, alliances, and failures without accepting the imperial caricature. One can recognize that he broke with Peter without assuming that this defines him as traitor for all time. One can recognize that the horse legend shaped culture without treating it as biography. One can recognize the anathema without treating it as the last word on his soul. Complexity does not forbid judgment. It improves it.

Inherited caricature becomes most dangerous when it is used to justify present violence. A dead man's alleged shame becomes the moral foundation for hating living people. The Telegram post shows this transition. Mazepa's caricature is not left in the past. It is attached to Zelensky and to Ukraine. The prayer for Russian military liberation depends on the reader accepting the caricature as sacred truth. Once that happens, modern conquest can be imagined as historical justice.

This is why careful writing about Mazepa is not merely antiquarian. It is a defense against the misuse of memory. When old caricatures are revived in war, they can shape what violence seems permissible. They can make the removal of monuments feel like purification, and the removal of governments feel like divine correction. The stakes are therefore real. How Mazepa is remembered affects how Ukraine is interpreted.

The inherited caricature of Mazepa teaches a broader lesson: history becomes dangerous when vivid fragments are mistaken for complete truth. The horse is not the man. The traitor label is

not the whole political context. The anathema is not the entire religious record. The Telegram post is not history. Each fragment must be returned to its layer, its source, its function, and its use. Only then can the name be freed from the caricature that has ridden it for centuries.

7.4 Why Mazepa still matters

Mazepa still matters because the questions attached to his name have not disappeared. They have changed form, but they remain active. Who has the right to define Ukraine's past? Is Kyiv a center of its own sacred and political history, or a subordinate origin myth for Russian imperial civilization? Is resistance to Moscow treason or self-defense? Can a figure condemned by an imperial church order be restored as an Orthodox patron? These questions are not dead. They are being fought again in new language.

Mazepa matters first as a test of Ukrainian historical subjecthood. If Ukraine is allowed to remember Mazepa as a patron and defender of autonomy, then Ukraine appears as a political community with its own long memory of statecraft, church culture, and resistance. If Mazepa must remain only a traitor to Peter, then Ukraine's history remains subordinated to the moral categories of Russian imperial power. The dispute over one man becomes a dispute over whether Ukraine can narrate itself.

He matters also because he exposes the difference between loyalty and justice. Empires often define loyalty vertically: obedience to the ruler, center, or imperial order. Borderland communities may define loyalty differently: obligation to local rights, traditions, faith, or survival. Mazepa's break with Peter forces the question of which loyalty was higher. This is not merely an eighteenth-century dilemma. Modern Ukraine faces the same imperial accusation: that separation from Moscow is betrayal rather than legitimate self-determination.

Mazepa matters because he complicates the relationship between Orthodoxy and empire. Russian-aligned rhetoric often treats Moscow's political order and Orthodox sacred continuity as inseparable. Mazepa's life disrupts that equation. He was an Orthodox patron who resisted Peter's imperial project. His patronage shows that Ukrainian Orthodoxy and anti-Muscovite political action could coexist. This is why his return to the Lavra is symbolically explosive. It demonstrates that opposition to Moscow need not be opposition to Orthodoxy.

He matters because his memory reveals how defeat shapes history. Poltava allowed the victor to define the rebel. For centuries, Mazepa's name carried the weight of the losing side. Modern restoration asks whether military defeat should determine moral truth forever. This question extends far beyond Mazepa. Many peoples have had their heroes defined as criminals by empires that defeated them. Recovering such figures is part of decolonizing memory.

Mazepa matters because he shows how sacred condemnation can be politically produced. The anathema against him cannot be understood apart from the context of his break with Peter and

the imperial order that followed. To examine this does not require contempt for Orthodoxy. It requires historical honesty about the relationship between church authority and state power. In modern Ukraine, where religious institutions remain entangled with geopolitics, this question remains urgent.

He matters because he demonstrates the endurance of imperial emotional vocabulary. Words like traitor, ingrate, schismatic, cursed, and desecrator still circulate in modern rhetoric. They are not decorative. They structure perception. The Telegram post proves that eighteenth-century condemnation can be repackaged for twenty-first-century war. Mazepa's name remains a living wire because the old imperial categories are still being used.

Mazepa matters because he forces a confrontation with myth. The wild-horse legend is famous, memorable, and culturally productive, but historically doubtful. Its persistence shows that public imagination often privileges spectacle over evidence. This has modern implications. In a media environment saturated with images, memes, and emotionally charged narratives, the Mazeppa legend is an early case of viral symbolic distortion. It teaches how a dramatic image can outlive and overpower context.

He matters because he links high culture and low culture. Few figures can connect Peter the Great, Byron, Pushkin, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, comic strips, Tulsa television, Zelensky, and Telegram propaganda. The chain is improbable but real. It shows how cultural memory ignores the boundaries scholars often impose. A name can move from imperial archive to opera house to newspaper cartoon to local television studio to wartime smartphone. This breadth makes Mazepa unusually useful for studying transmission.

Mazepa matters because he reveals how comedy preserves forgotten history. Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi was not a lesson in Ukrainian politics. Yet the name's survival in Tulsa shows that cultural fragments can persist in playful form long after their origins are forgotten. The comic afterlife is not historically accurate, but it is historically meaningful. It demonstrates that popular memory may keep a door open, even when it has misplaced the key.

Mazepa matters because his commemoration tests the politics of sacred space. The Lavra is not merely a historical site. It is a place where living communities struggle over jurisdiction, inheritance, sanctity, and sovereignty. Honoring Mazepa there asks whether sacred space can be cleansed of imperial suppression without being reduced to state propaganda. It asks whether a patron's memory can be restored despite an inherited curse. These are difficult questions, and their difficulty proves the importance of the case.

Mazepa matters because his name can still provoke prayer for conquest. This is the most disturbing evidence of his relevance. A bust or memorial marker can trigger a digital call for the Russian army to enter Kyiv and remove traitors. That reaction shows that the struggle is not only

about the past. It is about the future political and spiritual order of Ukraine. Mazepa remains a symbol through which people imagine what should happen next.

Mazepa also matters because he resists final ownership. No single tradition can fully exhaust him. Russian memory can curse him, but cannot erase his patronage. Ukrainian memory can honor him, but cannot remove his ambiguities. Western literature can mythologize him, but cannot fully detach him from history. Tulsa comedy can make him absurd, but cannot destroy the buried ancestry of the name. Telegram propaganda can weaponize him, but its fury reveals that the old verdict is insecure.

This resistance to ownership makes Mazepa a powerful figure for the present. Modern conflicts over history often involve attempts to monopolize meaning. States, churches, platforms, and movements all try to fix the past into usable categories. Mazepa slips those categories because his afterlife is too varied. He is traitor and patron, myth and man, curse and monument, horseman and horror host. The plurality of his meanings is not a weakness. It is the evidence of cultural survival.

Mazepa matters because the war over Ukraine is also a war over historical grammar. Russia's claim is not only territorial. It is narrative. It claims the right to define Ukraine's past, sacred origins, political legitimacy, and acceptable memory. Ukraine's resistance is therefore not only military. It is also archival, linguistic, ecclesiastical, monumental, and symbolic. Restoring Mazepa is one act within that wider resistance.

Finally, Mazepa matters because he teaches that memory can be repaired but never simplified safely. Repair requires recovering what was suppressed: his patronage, political reasoning, Ukrainian context, and Lavra connection. But repair must also preserve complexity: his elite status, strategic calculation, limited support, defeat, and ambiguity. The goal is not to replace one myth with another. The goal is to free the name from monopoly so that history can breathe again.

7.5 Conclusion: the battlefield inside the name

The story of Mazeppa and Mazepa ends where it began: inside a name that will not stay still. A name is not merely a sound attached to a person. It can become a battlefield. In this case, the battlefield includes Ukraine and Russia, Kyiv and Moscow, Orthodoxy and empire, history and myth, comedy and sacred memory, archive and propaganda. Every use of the name chooses a side in one of these struggles, even when the user does not fully know it.

The battlefield begins with the historical Mazepa, whose political life placed him between autonomy and empire. His break with Peter the Great made his name available for condemnation. His defeat at Poltava allowed the victorious imperial order to define him as traitor. His anathema marked him with spiritual disgrace. But his patronage of Orthodox

institutions, including the sacred landscape of Kyiv, prevented that condemnation from being the whole truth. The battlefield was present from the start because the man himself stood at a line of conflict.

The battlefield widened when Mazepa became Mazeppa. Western Romantic culture transformed the political figure into the bound rider. This did not merely spread the name; it changed the terrain of struggle. The historical question became an image of exposure and punishment. The man of diplomacy and patronage became the body tied to the horse. The battlefield moved from archives and imperial decrees into poems, paintings, operas, and theaters. The name became more famous but less historically grounded.

The battlefield shifted again when the myth entered popular comedy. A boy tied to a donkey, an old comic-strip title, and finally Dr. Mazeppa Pompazoidi in Tulsa show that the name could survive as absurdity. Here the battlefield seems to become harmless. No one is fighting over Peter, Poltava, or the Lavra in a late-night comedy persona. Yet even this harmlessness matters. It proves that names can escape the control of the political systems that first defined them. The cursed traitor of imperial memory can become a beloved local joke thousands of miles away.

The battlefield returned to sacred seriousness at the Lavra. When Ukraine honored Mazepa as patron, the name reentered the struggle over church, state, and historical justice. The bust or memorial did not simply add another figure to a sacred site. It challenged the inherited imperial verdict. It said that Mazepa belonged not only to the history of betrayal written by his enemies, but also to the history of Orthodox patronage and Ukrainian self-definition. This was a battle over whether the curse still governs the name.

The Telegram reaction shows that the battle is not metaphorical only. The post's final prayer for Russian military liberation turns memory into a desire for force. The name Mazepa becomes part of the moral machinery by which conquest is imagined as purification. The battlefield inside the name spills outward into the battlefield around Kyiv. This is the most serious warning of the paper: symbolic wars are not harmless when they authorize real violence.

The name's battlefield contains several competing verdicts. One verdict says Mazepa was a traitor and remains cursed. Another says he was a patron and early defender of Ukrainian autonomy. Another says he is Mazeppa, the wild rider of Romantic myth. Another says he is a comic name from Tulsa television. Another says he is a propaganda object useful for condemning Zelensky and sacralizing Russian conquest. The question is not whether all verdicts are equally true. They are not. The question is how they coexist and compete in public memory.

To study the battlefield inside the name is to resist premature closure. The imperial verdict closed the case by declaring treason. Romantic myth closed the case by replacing politics with spectacle. Comic mutation closed the case by turning the name into absurdity. Propaganda

closes the case by fusing shame, curse, and military hope. Historical writing reopens the case. It does not do so to acquit Mazepa of all complexity, but to prevent any single inherited caricature from ruling unchallenged.

The battlefield also reveals a struggle over who may speak for Orthodoxy. Is Orthodoxy identical with the Russian imperial memory that cursed Mazepa? Or can Ukrainian Orthodoxy remember him as a patron of sacred institutions? Can the Lavra's own material history testify against the inherited anathema? Can sacred space hold a more complicated truth than polemic allows? These questions make Mazepa's name a theological as well as political battlefield.

It is also a linguistic battlefield. Mazepa or Mazeppa, Kyiv or Kiev, president or dictator, patron or traitor, restoration or provocation, liberation or invasion: each pair shows how naming shapes reality. The Telegram post understands this instinctively. It renames in order to conquer interpretation. The historian must answer by naming carefully, distinguishing layers, and refusing loaded shortcuts.

The battlefield inside the name is also a battlefield between memory and evidence. Memory remembers what it needs. Evidence complicates what memory simplifies. Russian imperial memory needs the traitor. Ukrainian restoration needs the patron. Romantic memory needs the horse. Tulsa memory needs the comic persona. Telegram propaganda needs the cursed adulterer-traitor. Evidence does not abolish these needs, but it can expose them. It can show what each memory system selects and what it hides.

The final lesson is that cultural transmission is never innocent once war returns to the scene. A comic fragment may be innocent in Tulsa, but the same name can become deadly serious in Kyiv. A legend may be aesthetically fascinating in poetry, but politically poisonous when used to justify hatred. A church anathema may appear as old ritual language, but become modern propaganda when invoked to sanctify conquest. The past is not dead material. It can be rearmed.

Yet the name's multiplicity also offers hope. Because Mazepa/Mazeppa has never been fully controlled, no propaganda use can permanently own him. The imperial curse did not erase the patron. The horse legend did not erase the statesman. The comic persona did not erase the historical root. The Telegram denunciation cannot erase the Lavra connection. Each reduction fails because the name has too many lives.

This is why the article's title must hold both forms: Mazeppa and Mazepa. The doubled spelling keeps the split visible. Mazepa is the historical wound. Mazeppa is the mythic and comic afterlife. Together they reveal how a name travels, mutates, degrades, survives, and returns. The story is not only about a Ukrainian hetman or a Tulsa comedian. It is about the strange fate of names in human culture.

The battlefield inside the name remains active because the larger battle remains active. Ukraine is fighting not only for territory but for the right to define its own sacred and political inheritance. Russia and its aligned voices continue to claim interpretive authority over Kyiv, Orthodoxy, and figures like Mazepa. Western audiences inherit fragments, sometimes through poetry, sometimes through comedy, sometimes through propaganda. The task of writing is to slow the fragments down, restore their layers, and show how they are being used.

Mazepa's name has been tied to a horse, cursed by empire, sung by poets, staged by performers, parodied by cartoonists, worn by a Tulsa comic doctor, restored at the Lavra, and cursed again on Telegram. No single sentence can contain that journey. But the journey itself teaches the central truth: memory is not a museum. It is a battlefield of living signs. And few signs have traveled stranger, farther, or with more explosive returns than Mazeppa and Mazepa.

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The author has published over 5,600 AI-assisted papers at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Douglas-Youvan/research . Google Scholar has indexed these preprints, and if you want a particular reference, the AI mode of a Google search (Gemini) has efficiently catalogued these preprints.